



KIM ADAMS  
MOWRY BADEN

# MISE EN SCENE

ROLAND BRENER  
AL McWILLIAMS  
LIZ MAGOR  
JERRY PETHICK



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## LIST OF CONTENTS

Foreward	5
Statement of Intent	6
Mise en scène: A mutually interrupted text	9
Kim Adams	22
Mowry Baden	40
Roland Brener	58
Al McWilliams	76
Liz Magor	94
Jerry Pethick	112
Biographies	130







## FOREWORD

The Vancouver Art Gallery is pleased to present this exhibition of three-dimensional works by British Columbia artists. Our examination of this subject, in the face of what A.M. Hammacher called "... the overwhelming development of sculpture" is, of course, not conclusive. We did devote all our human resources (three curators collaborated in the formulation of this exhibition) and our physical resources (all of the Gallery's display spaces) to this show. The task, inevitably, was a difficult one, because many artists and their works were considered, while only a few could be selected; therefore this exhibition is only a partial representation of three dimensional work in this Province.

We thank the artists, those who are shown and those who are not, for their co-operation and interest in this project. I also want to thank the curators, Jo-Anne Birnie Danzker, Lorna Farrell-Ward, and Scott Watson for their joint efforts and commitments, and consideration for each other's point of view.

Luke Rombout  
Director

## STATEMENT OF INTENT

An exhibition of this kind does not proceed from a concept — it proceeds from a recognition. We felt that sculpture in this region was strong and vital and we wanted to mount an exhibition which made that apparent.

In preparing the exhibition, one issue that concerned us was the concept of place vs. regionalism. For these are different things. A place is a *locus*, a geography and a spirit. A region is often conceived as the hinterland, cultural and economic, of another place. British Columbia is a place and a region and because of this reality we confronted a classic problem. Did the works have something in common? And did these characteristics speak of place and region. We cannot say that this issue has been dealt with definitively. We would rather leave this question an open one. However, this should be an occasion to dispel a cliché. The work in *Mise en scène* is not funky, laid-back or influenced by the mysteries of the rain-forest. It is ambitious, urban; the city, as a bearer of cultural values, seems to be of concern.

The title of the exhibition, *Mise en scène*, is a French theatre term which can be translated as "production values". It refers to "staging" and "representation". It alludes to a relevant critical issue in postmodern art concerning formalism and theatricality. The title also opens onto established metaphors about politics and reality. We borrowed the term from Artaud who defined *mise en scène* "as a language in space and movement".\* For Artaud, the concept of *mise en scène* was the vehicle for giving to the body the rights of a language: "Once we regard this language of the *mise en scène* as the pure theatrical language, we must discover whether it can attain the same internal ends as speech, whether theatrically, and from the point of view of the mind, it can claim the same intellectual efficacy as the spoken language".\*\*

It was also our intention to present the work of six individuals in a manner that provokes thought without misrepresenting passionate individual concerns.

Finally, and most importantly, we would like to thank the artists: Kim Adams, Mowry Baden, Roland Brener, Liz Magor, Al McWilliams and Jerry Pethick. Working with them has been a rewarding experience. The mounting of work on this scale requires months of preparation and some personal expense on the part of the artist. We were entrusted with visions and statements. We hope we have not betrayed that trust.

Jo-Anne Birnie Danzker

Lorna Farrell-Ward

Scott Watson

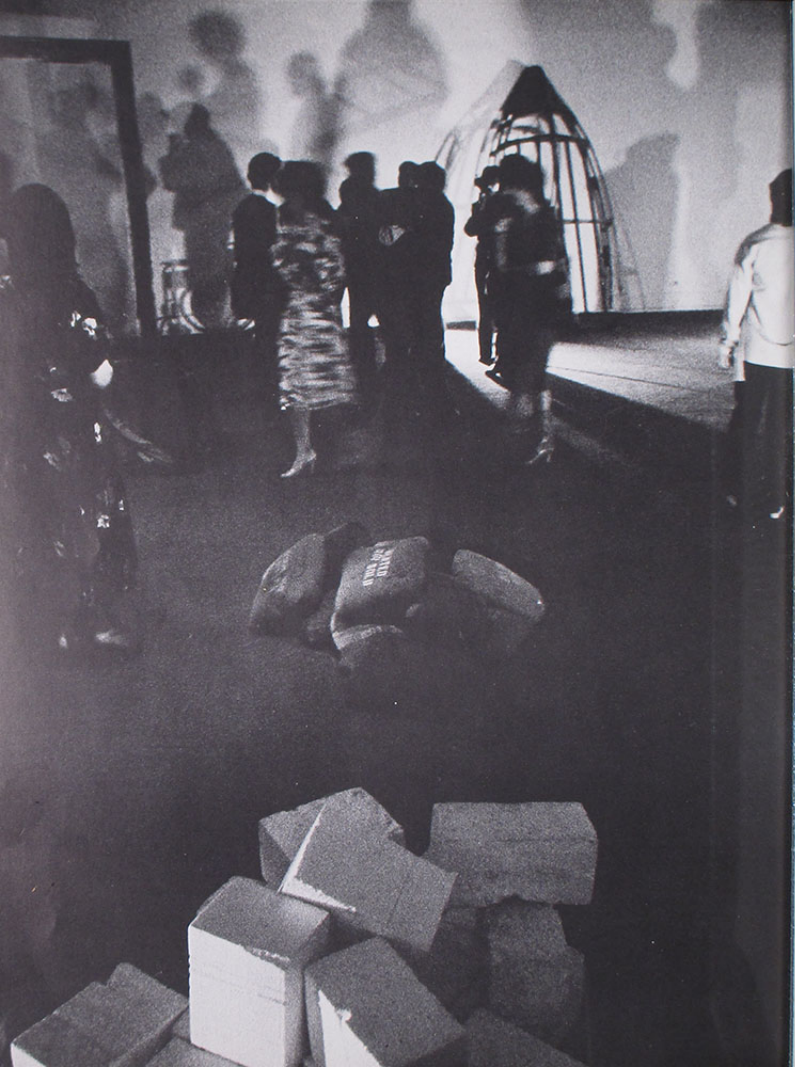
\*Antonin Artaud, "Metaphysics and the *mise en scène*", *The Theatre and its Double*, translated by Mary C. Richards (New York: Grove Press, 1958) p. 45.

\*\*Artaud, "Oriental and Occidental Theatre", *op. cit.*, p. 69.

The curators wish to thank Chief Preparator, Jim Parker; Preparators, Keith Mitchell, Michael Trivillon, Allister Brown, Don Spence and Bill Taylor; Audio-visual Technician, Patrick Ready; and Manuel Pacheco for their very able assistance in installing the exhibition; also Russell Keziere, Vanguard Editor; Rosemary Emery, Exhibitions Coordinator; and Hazel Currie, Curatorial Secretary for their help in preparing the catalogue.







## MISE EN SCENE: A MUTUALLY INTERRUPTED TEXT

I

*Whence are we, and why are we? Of what scene  
The actors or spectators?*

Shelley<sup>1</sup>

Because the artists in *Mise en scène* are not a group — no one artist in the exhibition is familiar with the work of all the others — one cannot claim to bring forth a shared aesthetic when one mounts an exhibition of British Columbia sculpture.

However, according to a theory which is an accepted given among art historians and critics, art is an expression of place and era as well as an individual statement. This theory was first developed by Hippolyte Taine who was appointed Professor of Art History and Aesthetics at the Ecole des beaux-arts in Paris in 1863. Following the then dominant mode of positivist discourse, Taine believed that three factors converged to determine not only art production but every aspect of civilization, *la race, le milieu, and le moment*.<sup>2</sup> Race is, of course, a discredited historical concept, having become conflated with racism. The notion, however, has taken root in other, related abstractions like nation, culture and ethnicity.

Accordingly, if we know something of the milieu of British Columbia, and something of the temper of the times, we can expect contemporary British Columbia art to reflect these factors which have a hand in determining the outlook of the artists who make art.

In order to examine the possibility that British Columbia art has singular characteristics, a place should be distinguished from a region. A place is a location, a geography, persons, activity and what we could call culture. A region is a place dominated culturally and economically by another place or several places. Regionalism, therefore, is a complex issue. Here we concern ourselves with not only the economic base in Canada, but as the whole country, the base of power to the south. In British Columbia the artistic community has responded to this situation with the recognition of "other networks" of interchange than those determined by the state (which is hurtling full-speed towards the nineteenth century concept of the "nation"). They are the imaginations of the West Coast as a cultural region or a Pacific Nation (as opposed to the East Coast) and the Pacific Rim, (which sees the Pacific as a field of communication and cultural contact like the Atlantic or Mediterranean). If one were to characterize this place/region in a manner that might shed light on the art in *Mise en scène* I would note that in British Columbia all the towns and cities proximate the wilderness. This is still a frontier culture; "A culture which has yet to be named", which "deals with margins and border".<sup>3</sup> The fact that British Columbia is a region as well as a place may explain the deepness of the social/political concerns that these works inhabit. No matter how innocent of such concerns these works may appear, they are political in the high sense of the word being concerned with *polis*. "Polis is eyes"<sup>4</sup> and the artists in *Mise en scène* "are the archaeologists of the place".<sup>5</sup>

The era is international. Regional tensions are now global tensions. The imagination of the future is perhaps, now, more eschatological than it has ever been. The writers of the *Book of Revelations* foresaw the end, but that end of human history had an afterlife, in heaven and hell. Our imagination of the end of history and our means to produce this event have no beyond.

The work in *Mise en scène* deals neither with the economic determinants of the region nor with the primary crisis of the era in an open, didactic way. Nor does it deal with the particularities of place despite the imperative, from the Group of Seven on, that Canadian art can only be such if it describes a spiritual geography.

However, perhaps there are two fundamental errors in the given method. One should first be highly suspect of Taine himself, which, when his deep class bias is revealed, seems neither objective nor scientific. But even if there is validity in the Taineian method — its tenacity and pervasiveness seem to indicate that there is a widespread feeling that the method does produce knowledge — we should not expect the signs of the region, place and era to be served to us on a platter. If, as is often claimed, we live in a repressive culture, those signs, as a matter of course, will be hidden. Perhaps the historical content of the work in *Mise en scène* will be revealed if we stick to the questions: Why does this work have a performative aspect? Why do all the artists see habitual modes of perception as obstacles to be overcome?

1. "Adonais", lines 184-185

2. Edward T. Gargan, "Introduction", Hippolyte Taine, *The Origins of Contemporary France* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1974) p. xxvii.

3. Remarks by Jo-Anne Birnie Danzker

4. Charles Olson

5. Jo-Anne Birnie Danzker



"Our life is a theatre piece, in which non-objective feeling is portrayed by objective imagery."<sup>6</sup>

The powerful associative potential of some of these works (particularly that of Magor's and McWilliams') would, at first glance, contradict their patient materiality. Contradictions, however, become part of the event, (this is especially true since insofar as I, the viewer, am allowed to practice my difference as part of the event). Neither Magor nor McWilliams acknowledge any extraordinary difficulty in reconciling materiality, in all its objective primacy, with the vagaries of emotive responses. They do acknowledge the ordinary and familiar difficulty of respecting the place, the location of the event. There is, in short, no separation line between the art work and its location or its source. The object and location become completely overlapping. The layers of syntax which the works appeal to, i.e. both material presence and associative potential, can co-exist without compromise.

Magor in fact describes a phenomenon in which the viewer's experience can come quite close to the original experience. By "approximating a condition, or comparing things that are similar," Magor would like to arrive at a situation in which information is shared rather than imparted.

Indeed, one cannot, really, contemplate a *direct* transmission of images and ideas from one person to another. One can, however, conceive new beginnings; the cycle returning to its starting point with increased velocity. The exact replication of an experience is irrelevant so long as the essence of the original experience is acted upon and renewed. Magor herself demonstrated such a "new beginning" when she was selecting her images for the book and catalogue. For *Eighteen Books*, Magor elected to juxtapose images of the boat on which one narrator of the piece looks out for the ailing Dorothy, alongside the image of Dorothy's house. In the sequence which Magor composed, these images increase in size until the round porthole on the boat and the rectangular window of Dorothy's house occupy the entirety of the page. At this point the formal composition exactly replicates the international distress flag motif which inspires one of her original lead book pages. Subjectivity and objectivity both become means to an end, and the artist is caught up in an ever changing critique of that phenomenon. As Bachelard comments in his *Poetics of Space*:

"In my earlier works on the subject of the imagination, I did, in fact, consider it preferable to maintain as objective a position as possible with regard to the images. . . I tried to consider images without attempting personal interpretation. Little by little, this method, which has in its favour scientific prudence, seemed to me to be an insufficient basis on which to found a metaphysics of the imagination. . . to say one has left certain intellectual habits behind is easy enough, but how is it to be achieved?"<sup>7</sup>

The difficulty of achieving this state provides an integrating tension to the art of Al McWilliams. His *Axaxaxas mlō* contains incisive images that strive to be as directly accessible to others as they are directly related to his personal experience. I am, like others, tempted to merely explore his syntax and engage in voyeuristic speculation as to the autobiographical significance of these images. But in doing this I suppress my own responses and, indeed, ignore my own responsibilities. I am forced to go beyond my initial interest in the exotic associations of his ziggurat temple, the sound of barking dogs from an Egyptian desert, the mundane familiarity of a metal fence made in Vancouver. McWilliams is indicative of an infrarealism, rather than a surrealism; he evokes not a dream state but that moment of waking consciousness in which the passive immediacy of dreams is melded with the active acceptance of the present context. Similarly, Roland Brener's *Amnesia* is also indicative of an intuitive apprehension of the potency of the image. The formal relationships of line, mass and light are revealed in their ordinariness but when taken together they become simultaneously dislocated from that ordinariness. Perhaps they are suggesting an ethics as well as a metaphysics of the imagination.

6. Kasimir Malevich, "Suprematism", *Modern Artists on Art*, Ten Unabridged Essays, edited by Robert L. Herbert (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1964).

7. Liz Magor, letter to Lorna Farrell-Ward, 1982.

8. Gaston Bachelard, *Poetics of Space* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969) p. xiv





if all  
civilization is somebody's childhood  
and somebody sits there forever x-ing  
it out ~~it's called~~ it's called  
de-construction  
Robin Blaser<sup>9</sup>

And suddenly my brain became as sand  
Where the first wave had more than half-erased  
The track of deer on desert Labrador;  
Whilst the wolf, from which they fled amazed,  
Leaves his stamp visibly upon the shore,  
Until the second bursts; . . .  
Shelley<sup>10</sup>

Rereading Liz Magor's letter in which she outlines the then current state of her proposed work, *Eighteen Books* and *A Resemblance*, I was struck by the literalness of her metaphor of the beach. "I'm thinking of changing the set-up in the gallery so that there is only access to the ends of the lead ocean (the beach)... This would be better in terms of making the printing on the lead harder to read and therefore more vestigial, and it is more like being at the edge of the water and unable to march across it." If this marks an extreme moment in *Mise en scène*, then Mowry Baden's *Kinhin* marks another extreme. Much of the work in *Mise en scène* contains metaphor and reference to some degree, but here we are presented with the range of that containment. Magor places the viewer inside a metaphor; the viewer must read the gallery floor, on either side of the "lead ocean" as "beach". From the beach, the words in the ocean (the ocean of language? the ocean of *Moby Dick*?) become "vestigial" — traces. First, the metaphor is literal, but then beach and ocean themselves are metaphorical of a relationship between language and meaning, in the sense that we are presented with distance, movement and a question of legibility.

The lead material itself refers to ways of dealing with information. Magor noticed that in dealing with lead she dealt with newspaper people; people who dealt in information. This tied in with the work itself, as it is about resemblance and about systems of information. What we know and how we know it. Through a complex process of dislocation — every aspect of the piece is keyed to an event which is "described", but not discursively. By means of discrete intervals of memory, what is remembered, that which can be reenacted is examined until there is a resemblance — the piece attempts a description of being. "The metaphor, of course, is one concerning the issue of being here and not being here." (Artuad signalling through the flames as the ship goes down.)

*Kinhin* is also about being here and not being here. When Baden describes the "hit" or "imprint" the piece makes on/in the body (a wound?) (wounding the wounded?), you know that this is his intent, and his excitement in his own work. It has to do with attentiveness (waiting?). He brings forward reference reluctantly. But Baden would have the viewer (when I asked Kim Adams why Baden sometimes referred to the viewer as "the visitor", he replied, "I think Mowry thinks we are all just visitors") prefer the image of a stupa; the walk is meditative. In Zen practice it has to do with alertness in motion and thus Baden's work pries the body open. The normal and habitual — techniques of "not being here" — are broken at the proprioceptive level of muscular sensation and the viewer is given an experience of "being here". This is the experience of *Kinhin* while you walk on it, as you feel it. Baden's concern is with memory, with the *imprint* (vestige, track) which addresses memory and thus permanence. The body will remember the piece as it adjusts to the flat gallery floor. The body has memory, takes impressions of the most subtle sort and is, therefore, a victim of experience. The architectural metaphor in *Kinhin*, which is "after all" a constructed building, is not innocent. It asks a question. What is our condition in our cities? Architecture is an art of visibility. It illustrates power. Try walking down the stair traversed by ramps, interrupted by rises at the Robson Square Law Courts. It is an attack on the body symbolically keyed to the function of the building, the operation of the law, whose operations ultimately are about the confinement and regulation of the body. But the body adjusts to the new, to elevators, steps with irrational intervals, buses, trains, the assembly line, the school. If it did not it would go mad and in going mad be subjected to the straightjacket, the padded cell, and (in recent times) shock therapy. It adjusts by absenting itself; which is why, in Baden and Magor (and the other), the issue of "not being here" or "being here" is so paramount. Magor proposes this dialectic as a condition, (which should be seen in the context of information gathering in our culture). The distress motive in *Eighteen Books* reverberates for me. It is our distress as victims of alienation. In a like manner, Baden, by the mere gesture of proof, "the body is irrefutable", by the

indication of reference to a philosophy based on harmony with nature, and by his desire to work outdoors, means, perhaps, to indict architecture. Not architects, rather our cities, whose proprioceptive experience is one of shock, fragmentation and regulation, an enormous assault on the body which causes most of us to numb our perceptions and forget the body. Cities which seem to systematically fracture awareness and the sense of "being here" and instead, present us with the sociological. Maps of the zoo.

9. Robin Blaser, "DIARY, April 11, 1981," *Island 10* (Fall 1981).

10. "The Triumph of Life", lines 405-410

I am intrigued by the way in which art can investigate this "in-between" area, in-between self and not-self, subjectivity and objectivity, content and form — the physical ambivalence between the state of fluids and solids. For Mowry Baden, this area is called "the doorway between realities". Jerry Pethick would insist that he was dealing with models of reality. Kim Adams describes it as that space which exists right down the middle, between painting space (pictorial) and sculptural space (volume). In response to my question, "What of the space between? And the qualities of difference?", Pethick expands: "There is a difference between knowing and knowledge. Imagination has no barriers, nor do its visual constructs; they are spatial. The space of the desert, of the sea, of the sky, all are within the confines of our skull. To transpose these entities into a more viewable medium, from thought to manifestation, and to keep them as alive as the impulse and as spatial reality, this process is the unstated evolution."<sup>11</sup>

There are no barriers, either, between the four varying piles of lead fish in Liz Magor's *A Resemblance*. The changes between the piles, the unstated evolution, describe Dorothy's (the subject's) physical changes in a metaphoric way. As Magor observed: "I wanted to do a work that resembled this physical change and therefore would resemble Dorothy without a reiteration of her actual image."<sup>12</sup> Magor, like McWilliams, attempts to break down in order to clarify, creating a new world rather than reporting on an old one. Unlike the schizophrenic, whose fantasies and projected associations are fraught with self hate, this creative exercise is rooted in trust. This trust leads these artists to a new topography, to ideas which lead to new beginnings, new ideas, and to an integration of thinking with the act of looking.

Memory, like the mirrors in Jerry Pethick's work, is an illusion, reflections unlike the original image. Memory is a field for the reconstruction of the event after deconstruction of the facts of the event. The reflection is a new beginning for Pethick. So, too, Roland Brener's *Amnesia* explores this dichotomy between reconstruction and deconstruction, the assertion and abolition of memory. Retrieved objects, unable to be discarded, make way for the new. "There is a belief", Brener observed, "that we are experiencing things for the first time and that is because we have forgotten."<sup>13</sup>

The repetition and stacking of objects by Brener and Magor are physical metaphors and approximations of the gap that exists between the particularity of events and the continuousness of identity and resemblances. Resemblance is always a case of mistaken identity that alters the given. One is taught, in these works, not to trust our habits of perception, or the transmission of information, but rather to challenge that semblance.

11. Jerry Pethick, correspondence with Lorna Farrell-Ward, 1982

12. Liz Magor, correspondence with Lorna Farrell-Ward, 1982

13. Roland Brener, interview with Lorna Farrell-Ward and Scott Watson, 1982







Antonin Artaud, whose definitions of *mise en scène* helped define the performative aspects of the work in this exhibition for me, was, perhaps the most scathing critic of Western culture the modern era has produced; "a cultivated 'civilized' man is regarded as a person who thinks in forms, signs, representations — a monster whose faculty of deriving thoughts from acts, instead of identifying acts with thoughts, is developed to an absurdity".<sup>14</sup> Artaud argues we must be brought to life by means of a theatre of the *mise en scène*, "as a language of space and movement".<sup>15</sup> For Artaud, life is obscured by forms and systems "... we are not referring to life as we know it from its surface of fact, but to that fragile, fluctuating centre which forms never reach. And if there is still one hellish, truly accursed thing in our time it is our artistic dallying with forms, instead of being like victims burnt at the stake, signalling through the flames."<sup>16</sup> We can only come to terms with the skewing or misuse of our perceptual apparatus through the "irrefutable" fact of the body:

"For what, after all, are these ideas, data, values, qualities? Terms without life that take on substance only when the body has sweated them out, going through a dead sweat in order to help them decide to let themselves go. For the body doesn't ever need to define what it's done."<sup>17</sup>

Artaud felt that the theatre was the site where the body would be rescued, if at all. He meant more than theatre in the literal sense; "to break through language in order to touch life is to create or recreate theatre".<sup>18</sup> As much of the work in *Mise en scène* requires the movement and gestures of the viewer in order to become the piece as the artist has conceived it, Artaud is brought forward, not to redescribe the artist's intentions in his name, but in order to clarify the crisis which this work appears to be inside of. For work that includes the body of the viewer in the conception of the work will take on characteristics of the crisis of that object.

Kim Adams' work *The North Gallery*, as much as it is a highly intelligent manifestation of an artist's love of "constructivist" painting, concern for language (*sight* and *site* are everywhere in his work an interrogative dialectic) and a playful mastery of art historical concerns, is about fences, streets and the fleeting appearance of the other that is city life.

Magor, Brenner and Pethick use cinematic devices in their work in different ways, but Adams "incarnates" the cinema in the body of the viewer. Like Baden's work, Adams' work addresses the proprioceptive. The viewer experiences modifications in the experiences of walking as he or she explores the piece. But no walking will give a gestalt — an entire view. Trampoline-like ready-mades are placed so that the viewer may see over the walls (fences, symbolic of all boundaries and borders, even the skin of the body?) — into the room — a view the walls otherwise prevent. But this *sight* of the site cannot be very meditative or relaxed, it will require physical exertion and the effect will be momentary. The mind will have to take a "snap-shot". If there is more than one viewer in Adams' piece they will perceive the others as fragmented. They will see feet, heads, bodies traversed by struts, appearing and disappearing (the flicker of the cinema?). While the visual aspects of this piece (a piece whose relation to painting is profound in many aspects — especially those concerning portraiture) fragment the body, the kinaesthetic aspects push the body's awareness of itself to an extreme as the *mise en scène* forces the viewer to an awareness of gestures and movements of the body.

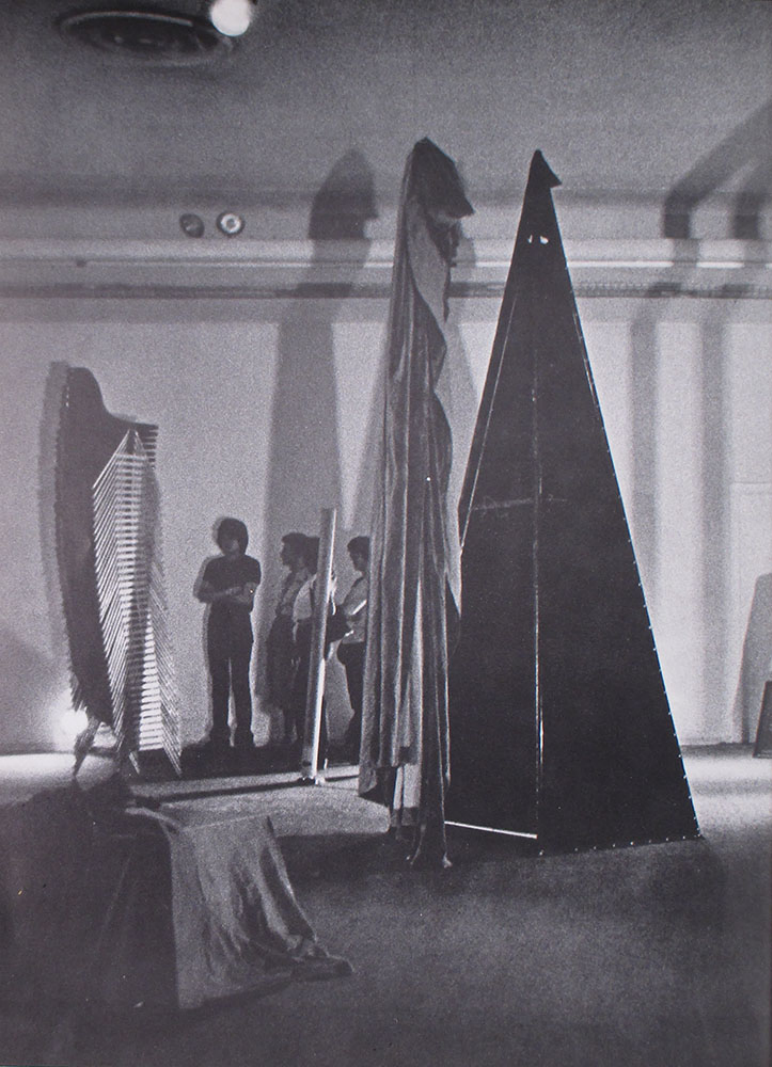
According to Roland Barthes, the fragmentation of the body is an action of language (before it is an action of architecture and urban "planning"?). He writes of de Sade, "Being analytical, language can come to grips with the body if it cuts it up; the total body is outside language, only pieces of the body succeed to writing, in order to *make* a body seen, it must either be displaced, refracted through the metonymy of clothing, or reduced to one of its parts..."<sup>19</sup> Artaud's image of the body without organs is an image of the body prior to its dissection by the operation of language. Aleksei Kruchenykh's attempt to create a trans-rational language on the model of glossolalia-zaum — in 1913, was an attempt to subvert the analytic function of language and thereby restore the body's integrity. In 1913 Kruchenykh and Malevich collaborated with the composer Mikhail Matiushin on an "opera", *Victory Over the Sun*. The point of the opera was to destroy and recreate form. According to Benedict Livshits, who saw the 1913 production, "The innovation and originality of Malevich's device consisted first of all in the use of light as a principle which creates form, which legitimizes the existence of a thing in space..." Malevich's lights not only established form they dissolved it: "The figures themselves were sliced by the blades of the beams; alternately hands, feet, and head were eliminated..."<sup>20</sup> By fragmenting the *form* of the body, Malevich was trying to re-establish the body — which he saw as a field of energy rather than a form; "It can be proved... that matter does not exist, but the sciences prove the existence of energy which comprises what we call body."<sup>21</sup> ("... that fragile, fluctuating centre which forms never reach" — Artaud).

The history of the art of this century has been punctuated by periodic invasions of the theatre, the site of the *mise en scène*, ever since Malevich and his collaborators brought together light, sculpture, painting, language (of sorts) and actors to restore the body to life. The work in *Mise en scène*, by engaging the viewer in performative actions, by its *desire* for a proprioceptive viewer, continues this tradition — but within the tradition of sculpture itself. A work of sculpture has always been an image of a body. This is what the word *image* means.

The theatricalization of the body is first of all a way of seeing the body. Unlike the theatre of the stage, sculpture has been able to not only address the question of the body's visibility, but its interior as well, the dark fluctuating centre which is life. In the work in *Mise en scène*, for the most part, the image of the body has been handed over to the viewer. The difference between a viewer's imagination of his or her body and the image the artist presents is a field the artists wish to open to question for this is the terrain of our habitual modes of perceiving reality. In this context the work in *Mise en scène* is subversive at a level of cultural operations which concern perception.

14. "Preface: The Theatre and Culture", *The Theatre and Its Double* trans. Mary C. Richards (New York: Grove Press, 1958) p. 7.
15. "Metaphysics and the *mise en scène*", *op. cit.*, p. 45.
16. "Preface: The Theatre and Culture", *op. cit.*, p. 13.
17. "Shit to the Spirit" *Antonin Artaud Anthology* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1965) p. 110.
18. "Preface: The Theatre and Culture", *op. cit.*, p. 13.
19. Roland Barthes, *Sade, Fourier, Loyola*, translated by Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1976) p. 127.
20. Charlotte Douglas, "Birth of a 'Royal Infant': Malevich and 'Victory Over the Sun'," *Art in America* (vol. 62, no. 2, March 1974) p. 50.
21. "God is not cast Down" (1920), *Essays on Art 1915-1933*, Ed. Troels Andersen (New York: George Wittenborn, 1968) p. 223.







Starting the walk up Mowry Baden's *Kinbin*, an act which needs a sense of direct alertness of self and other, requires a conscious decision to *not* separate mind and body. The memory of the body and the memory of the mind are meant to become one. Baden is aware that the viewer activates and puts energy into the situation. He lifts the viewer up, making him aware of a change in scale while giving affirmation of the body. "It is through the skin that metaphysics will be made to enter our minds."<sup>22</sup>

Kim Adams, sensing that our social experience is about fragmentation and division, explores the social impediments to this awareness in *The North Gallery*. His obstacle course of 4 x 4's on the floor and perspective corridors, sets up a situation demanding a new sense of trust on the part of the viewer. This becomes particularly apparent when one encounters Adams' Rebounder, a small trampoline. The viewer, according to Adams, gains new information when encountering the novel experience of using the trampoline; he "becomes 'loaded'" and "carries that through to the next part of the event".<sup>23</sup> Adams sees this active trust as a means of integration: "You'll be seeing everything for the first time up here."<sup>24</sup> A framed snapshot (memory) lost until the next bounce or movement along a wall, marks this new perception, symbolically.

Adams, like Baden, is referring back to the body in a way that requires conscious decision making. He asserts that the work is "not just about the word 'art', this thing is about us. . . . We all are, in a way, forgetting how we are being forced — a very simple thing is a sidewalk, a road, stoplights, and we no longer know what they are. We just accept them."<sup>25</sup>

Adams and Baden construct devices which challenge our assumptions and habits of perception. Al McWilliams, in his way, is similarly concerned with these challenges. In the passageway to the inner space of *Axaxaxas mlo*, the width and ceiling height of the metal fencing corridor gradually taper, forcing an increased concentration on the part of the person in the corridor. Memory, the maze, helps us to forget. It is, as McWilliams calls it, a "slow down".

They make the exercise of renewing a participatory trust while at the same time destroying illusions. What makes this difficult is the fact that the viewer is considered an active and necessary co-efficient of the event. The viewer's shadow participates in the totality of Brener's *Amnesia*. Adams creates a social space, one which is designed for participation and interaction. Baden similarly sees the viewer's body as a necessary component; he refers to the necessary "imprint" of the body, "viewer and work are in this head-on relationship with the only impingement being memory, history".<sup>26</sup>

What these artists have tried to remind us of is that art is not just an act of the eye, but an act of faith. "One push", writes Gaston Bachelard of the doors to perception, "and your future becomes visible". R.D. Laing in his publication *Self and Other*, quotes Confucius saying roughly the same thing — "The way out is via the door. Why is it that no one will use this method?"

22. Antonin Artaud, quote from *Under the Sign of Saturn* by Susan Sontag. (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1980)

23. Kim Adams in conversation with Lorna Farrell-Ward and Scott Watson, 1982.

24. *ibid.*

25. *ibid.*

26. Mowry Baden in conversation with Lorna Farrell-Ward and Scott Watson, 1982.

The way Brener deals with performance in *Amnesia* is to force the body to confront its own theatricality. The viewer's shadows activate the walls and mingle with the static shadows of the objects. The lights on the floor will glare in the viewer's eyes, a similar effect to that of footlights on a stage, and illuminate others in the Gallery in a somewhat melodramatic way. Barthes makes the point that in order "to combat this touch of fetishism contained in the very 'cutting' of the written sentence", which is the operation of language on the body, his subject, de Sade, deploys the stage and the theatre by the use of a "lit body", "the lit body has as its natural arena the intimate theatre, the nightclub, the fantasy, or the Sadean presentation..."<sup>27</sup> The light, is, of course, metaphorical of desire, which, if anything does, has the power to unite the body. To Barthes' list of nightclub, small theatre and fantasy one could well add a picture gallery containing full-length portraits and the silver screen as representation of the "lit body". (Pethick's *The Seventh Screen/Returning You to Regular Programming*, contains an image of the "lit body" as artist.)

Brener plays with the notions of gallery and cinema. Are the shadows representations? If so, are they representations of the viewer, the body, as presence/absence or of paintings as they coincide with the formal problems concerning positive and negative space on the wall? The question can be asked of the objects themselves which represent sculpture while remaining highly charged cultural items relating to the history of the building they are displayed in.

There are two images of ziggurats in *Mise en scène*: one in Baden's *Kinlin*, the other in McWilliams' *Axaxax mlö* (three, if you include Pethick's *The Lighthouse Invites the Storm*; four, if one remembers the importance of the ziggurat motif in Brener's work). As deployed by Baden, the image is meant to be walked on. It is a kinaesthetic as well as a visual image and furthermore the kinaesthetic is subversive to the visual. I am interested here in the act of subversion as I am in the relative value of the kinaesthetic or visual image. McWilliams' ziggurat is an object, a copper-sheathed image of a sacred structure within a transparent compound. The kinaesthetic is required by McWilliams, but as an event within the visual.

For Baden the reference is specific — kinlin is the zen meditation walk. For McWilliams the reference is less exact, but nonetheless present — to Islam, the Ka'aba, to the labyrinth, and perhaps to the prison. McWilliams requires a change of pace, a constricted walk simply to release the viewer from his or her immediately prior state of being so that she can confront the image.

The ziggurat — and all its attendant forms (tower, lighthouse, spiral, propellor) — is an image of mediation between heaven and earth. The spiral is an image of the intelligence of biology, of growth and order. In Tatlin's *Monument to the Third International* it becomes an image of revolution and of *rapprochement* between elementary solids and the efficacy of the material world (that is between two theories, materialist and idealist). Tatlin's model has achieved a belated status as a paradigm for postmodernist architectural sculpture and architecture. (This paradigmatic use of Tatlin unfortunately excludes Tatlin's actual philosophical and political programme — what he would have liked least — Tatlin the artist used to suppress Tatlin the activist.)

The ziggurat, finally, belongs to language as the ultimate image of language's deficiency and the collapse of communication — The Tower of Babel. In Western civilization the ziggurat has been used by the church as an image of man's vanity; by the state as an image of its power. The Tower of Babel as the mythic image of the dissemination and fragmentation of Indo-European into dozens of languages operates to indicate origins. It marks that archaic event when singularity "devolved" into difference. In our culture the image has been presented as a longing for sameness, behind which has stood all our totalitarian and utopian political ideas, which are about the exclusion, then murder of difference. In the twentieth century (because we are theocidal and the punitive aspect of the Babel myth seems transparent) the image of Babel ought to be reversed, or as some of the artists in *Mise en scène* might put it — "dematerialized". ("It can be proved... that matter does not exist, but the sciences prove the existence of energy which comprises what we call body.") Reversed, the image celebrates difference. Difference is experience. All of the artists in *Mise en scène* use previous experience to make a reenactment of experience. But the works are not biographical. They refer outward not inward. They are not, as one might expect in dark times, riddled with angst. Perhaps the enormity of the terror of the modern world makes individual expression seem small and out of place.

27. Barthes, *op. cit.*, p. 128.

"The viewer can become conscious of playing a role, that is, imagining a space for themselves to be what they are not, to do what they do not, to feel what they do not feel."

Al McWilliams<sup>28</sup>

The event we have been describing, that of the making and seeing of the art in *Mise en Scène*, acts out the dialectic between the flux of performance art and the stasis of, say, the specific sculptural object. If an image is an unveiling of an idea, it is also evidence of the internal procedure that produced it. We are not confronted with a *fait accompli*. The complex range of cross references which locate the viewer in a certain context, imply an open process, a process that is more democratic and less imperialistic but which does not deny responsibility and imperatives.

The forms exist, but sometimes as shadows. As Jung has said, "When an individual makes an attempt to see his shadow, he becomes aware of (and often ashamed of) qualities he denies in himself but can see in other people."<sup>29</sup> The artists in this exhibition, while not burdened with uniformity of style or the mutual expression of a single idea (the real legacy of a so-called pluralism), have indeed moved beyond the call to "dematerialization" of the art object. They have recognized, instead, the ceaseless energy that occurs between the two poles. "You can identify things," says Jerry Pethick, "by their shadows and then suddenly you think you know what you see and you look at the shadow and you've got something else — that kind of play is like the denial of materialization again, in a certain way."<sup>30</sup>

This, then, is the *Mise en scène* which these six sculptors have created for us. There is no one fixed idea, rather an acceptance of the current milieu which can be seen as potentially de-humanizing. They have accepted, as their ground, the alienated contemporary spirit perhaps most poignantly expressed in the divisions of minds and bodies. We move through a world which, in its complexity, forces us to block out as much information as we gather in. We censor and suppress. Moving outside the doors of the Vancouver Art Gallery and back on to Georgia Street where the line-up of traffic proceeds north over the Lions Gate Bridge, will remind us that we have to navigate our own course amidst it all. We will, for the sake of survival, reactivate that automatic navigation of space, retreat to the safe, habitual mode of misreading events, to a reliance on opinion. The artists in this exhibition have challenged our habitual activities as well as conceptual sets. They have accepted the city as a context and carrier of culture but without the infatuation or the historicist nostalgia of those who would propose to be "post-modernist".

28. Al McWilliams, interview with Lorna Farrell-Ward and Scott Watson, 1982.

29. Carl G. Jung, *Man and his Symbols* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co. Inc., 1964) p. 168.

30. Jerry Pethick, interview with Scott Watson, 1982.

This work, therefore, has nothing to do with psychology, and a psychological approach would yield nothing of interest to the viewer. The artists hope for something else. McWilliams calls it a "hum", like that made by a taut wire; Brener, a "buzz" which is experience reduced to a narrow band of intense expression; Magor, a "gap" which she tries, using resembles to make a revelatory moment; Baden refers to a "hit", an evocative word from the context of violence and drugs; Pethick to being "in between"; Adams to "loaded", (wealth, meaning). All these terms are personal synonyms for an extraordinary attention to being. Because in order to subvert habitual modes of perception, which are understood as systems of normalcy, one must begin again with the fundamental — the site of perception which is the body.

Scott Watson

Curator

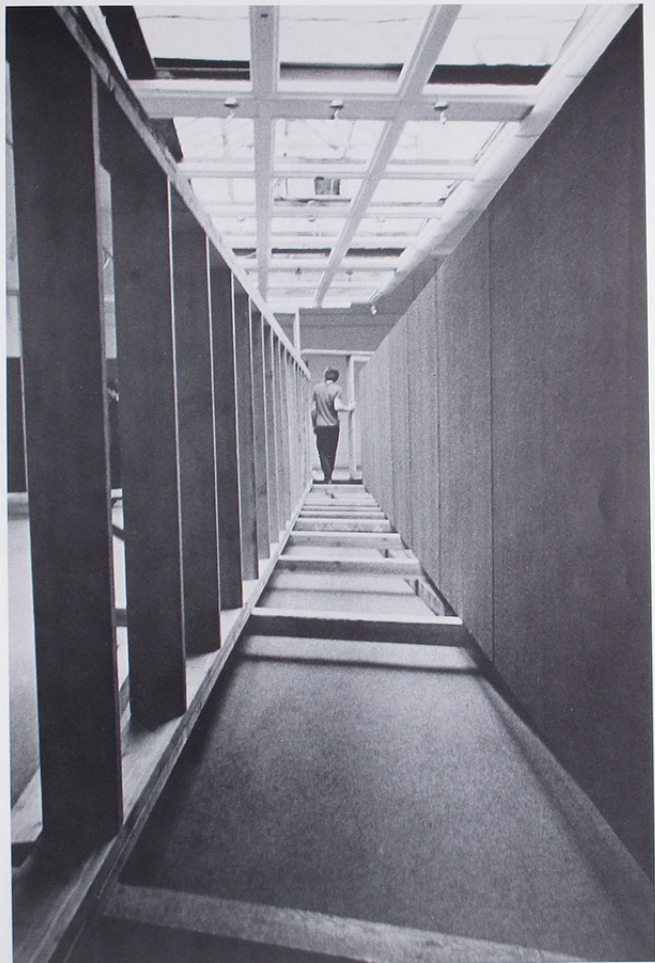
Lorna Farrell-Ward

Curator

# KIM ADAMS

## *THE NORTH GALLERY*

1982, cedar, fir, blackote board, Rebounders  
9.14 m x 19.35 m



THE NORTH GALLERY





*Colour Trough* 1990, 4' 4" x 2' 6" x 28", Open Space Gallery  
Photo: Linda Bedard

Looking down into, up at, from one end to the other, through. . .  
The trough shapes movement.

The color reflector trough became a feeding trough, through the position and motion taken in front of it. In approaching there was an expectation, but when confronting the piece the viewer became aware of his/her activity and the painted interior and reflected color.

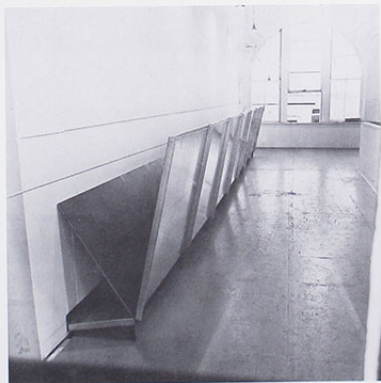


Colour Trough  
Photo: Zbigniew Olak

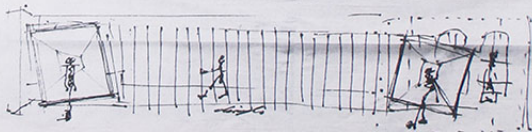
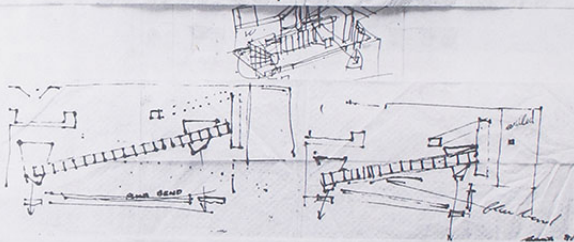
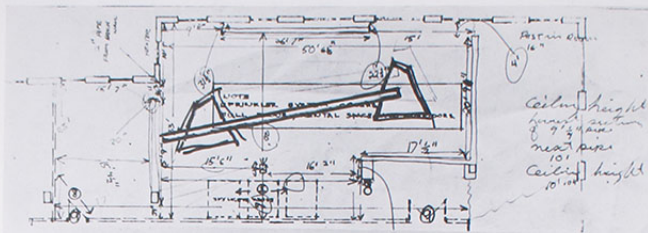
The experience of the space with natural light is subject to change.

The trough functioned as a receptacle of light received from outside and inside the room.

It reflected and distributed light and color on the floor and walls of the room.



Colour Trough  
Photo: Zbigniew Olak



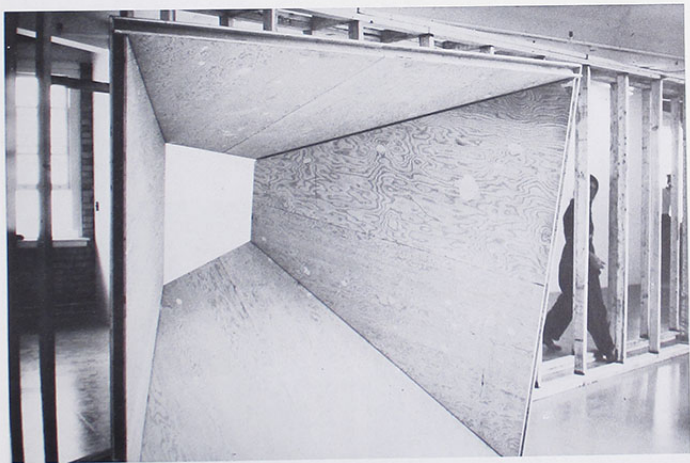
Viewer 1981, napkin drawings, preparatory sketches, Ydessa Gallery, Toronto  
 Photo: Zbigniew Olak



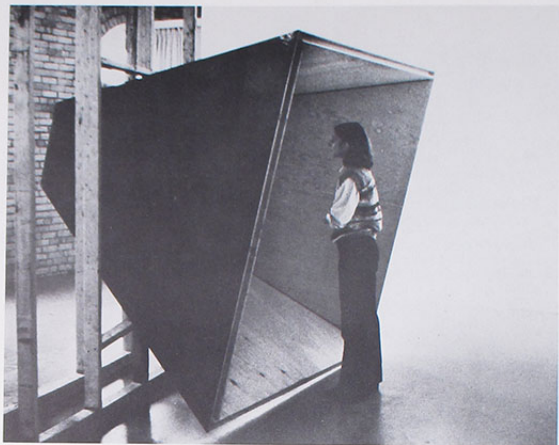
My strongest impression of the place was its location of windows and how they directed us to the outside world.

It is how that light was distributed in a particular part of the gallery that I was interested in; how it lit that corner of the space and the wider aperture of the constructed viewer.

The *Viewers* acted as a device for illusionistic perspective. One *Viewer* enabled a person to see an interior shot of the gallery and an exterior shot of the building across the street. The other *Viewer* allowed an exterior shot and a perspectival view of the buildings and the street below.



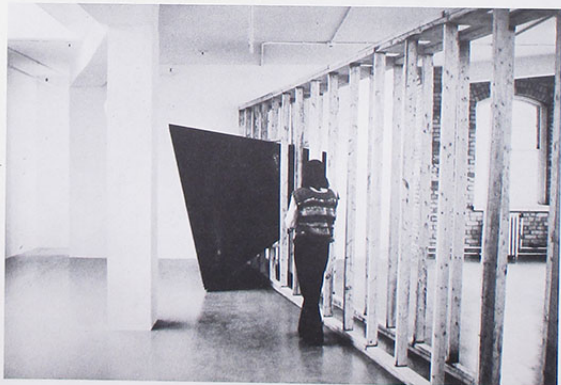
*Viewer* 1981, fir, plywood, enamel paint, Ydessa Gallery, Toronto  
Photo: Christine Toller



Viewer  
Photo: Christine Toller

They work as transmitters, as speakers, as viewers.

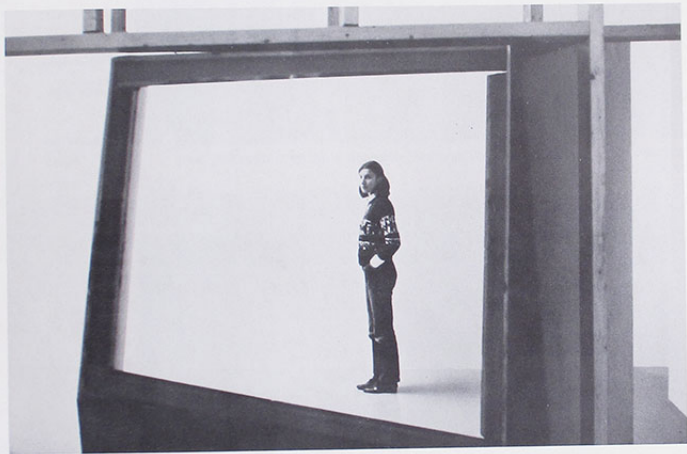
The *Viewers* present a dichotomy between the visual and auditory experience. What struck me most about the piece, the last time I was there, was that as you were on the inside of it (when you could look out at the city) there was this expectation of hearing. The *Viewers* did act as acoustical receptacles for the sounds both inside and outside the room. When viewing through the large opening, sounds were amplified as opposed to the small opening side where sounds became muffled.



Viewer  
Photo: Christine Toller

To build something that is transparent and still functions as a wall. There is a choice of using the transparent wall to walk with, or to go through.

The *Viewer* receives, focuses, and shapes what is available in the space such as ambient light, color, walls, windows, movement, postures, sound, etc.



*Viewer*  
Photo: Christine Toller

On the one side you get pictures, like Morandi under the skylights; on the other you get vision and hearing tied into each other.\*

The work approaches a juxtaposition between the idea of what pictorial space is in painting and the idea of volume in sculpture. These aspects give way to a larger issue which contracts the notion of a social factor in the work.

It is like a frame. There is this focusing on you when you walk through a frame. Most of the color in there was black and white except for the color of peoples' clothing.

\*Andy Patton (letter to Kim Adams).



Viewer  
Photo: Christine Toller

You can only see things so long and then there is an addition added or somebody takes another side of it.

There is a sociological framing as well as a construction terminology of framing 2 x 4's; the frame within the frame within the social frame — a window frame.

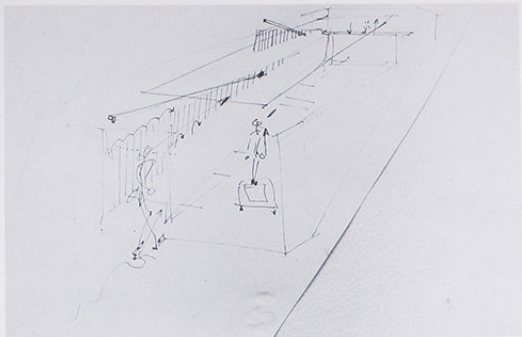


Viewer  
Photo: Christine Toller

The experience of being watched by another viewer establishes a focus which predicates a moment of time.

I want to watch the social interaction and watch how the piece is being perceived. (I am interested in that.) The interest for me is the viewer participation. I learn from the piece what to do next.

Preparatory Sketch, 1962  
The Vancouver Art Gallery  
The North Gallery  
Photo: Zbigniew Olsak



The roof light is like white gas.

The location of the work coheres with the properties of that space.

The Vancouver Art Gallery,  
North Gallery (1938-39)



If you walk in there and there are other people using the piece, there is participation, the activity is there.

I guess it goes back to that social role; how I'm able to set up a situation for myself and for others with my activity as an artist.

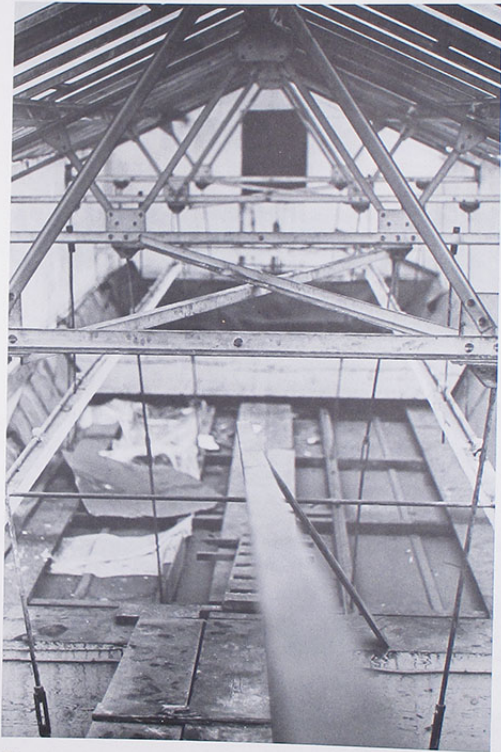
If they are able to see this animation (foot, head, walk, jump) they could connect this with the kind of fragmented view of people, things we see outside of the gallery.

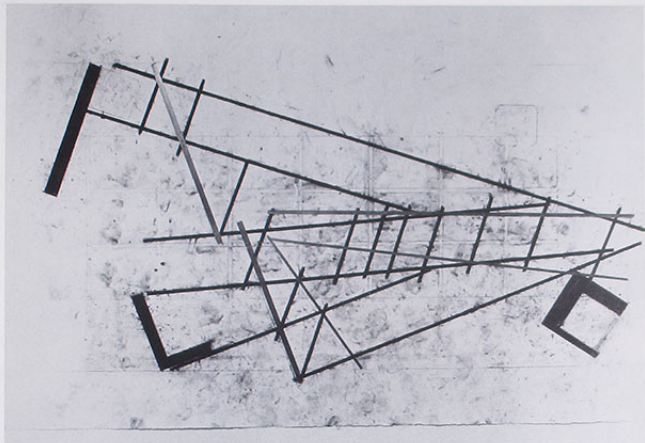
I build the pieces with the audience in mind, with the reaction of the audience from the previous piece. I don't think they can change my thoughts but they show me what and where something may be needed.



Above, the skylight is exposed and opens the gallery to the changing light of the world outside. It reveals the room as a container that served to protect the artwork from daylight exposure and climatic changes while isolating the art-experience from a collision with the outside world.

The Vancouver Art Gallery, Skylight, North Gallery, 1982  
Photo: Loma Farrell-Ward





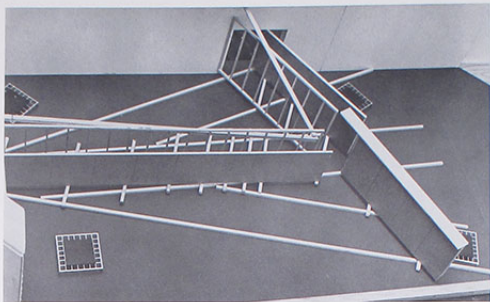
*The North Gallery, charcoal drawing (floor plan), 1982*

sight	sightline	diagonal walls
a perspective corridor		a skylight brought to light
structural lift		

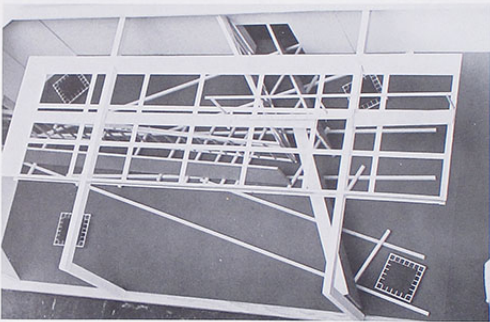
The new work obstructs vision as well as movement. It is in the way. OBJECT — n (ME objecten, fr. L. meut. of obivere, to throw in the way, present, hinder, fr. ob- in the way & jacere to throw more at OB-, JECT) something that is or is capable of being seen, touched, or otherwise sensed.

The skylight emphasizes the above, as the floor of the gallery calls attention to the below of one's body. Head and foot is what can be observed through the fragmentation of certain walls. The person as a whole and one's own perception of oneself is asserted and integrated by movement (the activity of jumping and walking) and the awareness of being seen as well as seeing.

The work's focus, its visual and formal properties, is diverted by its physical demands such as the mild obstacle course and the Rebounders.



Preparatory Model A (scale:  $\frac{3}{4}$ " to 1"), 1962  
Photo: Zbigniew Olak



Preparatory Model B (scale:  $\frac{3}{4}$ " to 1") 1962  
Photo: Zbigniew Olak

In both entrances a division is present immediately asking the viewer to make decisions. They are either going to say "yes" to this or "no" to that, or maybe to something else.

I'm trying to make it as easy as possible but also I want people to make decisions. And by making these decisions (we all make decisions) — I'm emphasizing how we operate in the world itself.

The people who feel it's another viewers' territory have a choice. There is this chance of going away from it and finding their own little side of it.

It is also about being with people, engaging in hiding, waiting, unexpected siting, the full or partial view of others, balancing, the quick appearance and disappearance of the other.

You can see over the walls, you can't see over them, you can see underneath them, you can see through them, and you can see with them as a directional guide.

There is a playing with film technology: speeding up, slowing down activity, animation of people appearing above and below.



We all are, in a way, forgetting how we are being focused — a very simple thing is a sidewalk, a road, stop-lights, and we no longer know what they are. We just accept them.

With time up here quick images are introduced into the work. I am introducing vision as quick images.

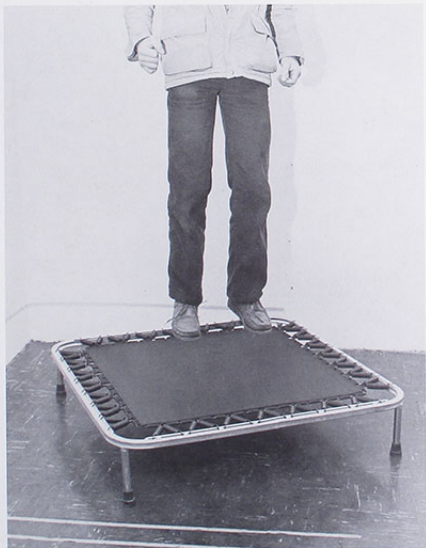
You have to try and see this one. You have a wall line and as soon as you jump, this line curves and stretches.

Using the body as part of a formal decision one senses the top of the ceiling, the space, the light.

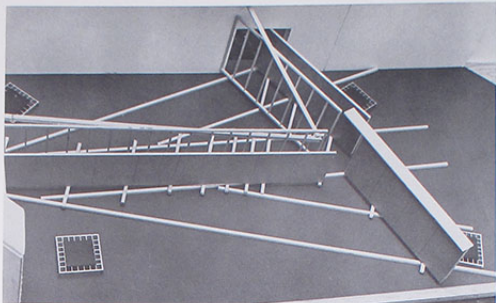
The direct physical demand of the Rebounder (a person coming up to them will know how to use them) gives rise to the question whether to engage in them or not, and, what the nature of this engagement might be. Decisions and attitudes regarding this engagement become disclosed, become visible; they stimulate an exchange of ideas, verbal entertainment, talking.

Whether they will walk out of there trying them or not, there is a strong imprint of what that could have been (of what it is).

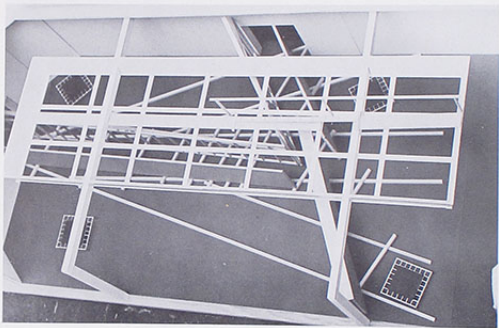
There is a singer there is a song.



Rebounder in use  
Photo: Zbigniew Olak



Preparatory Model A (scale:  $\frac{1}{4}$ " to 1"), 1982  
Photo: Zbigniew Olak



Preparatory Model B (scale:  $\frac{3}{4}$ " to 1") 1982  
Photo: Zbigniew Olak

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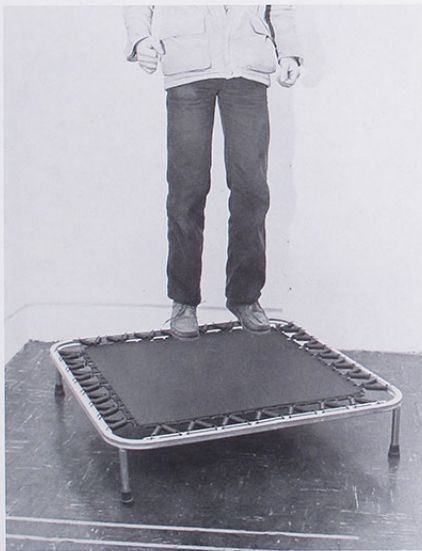
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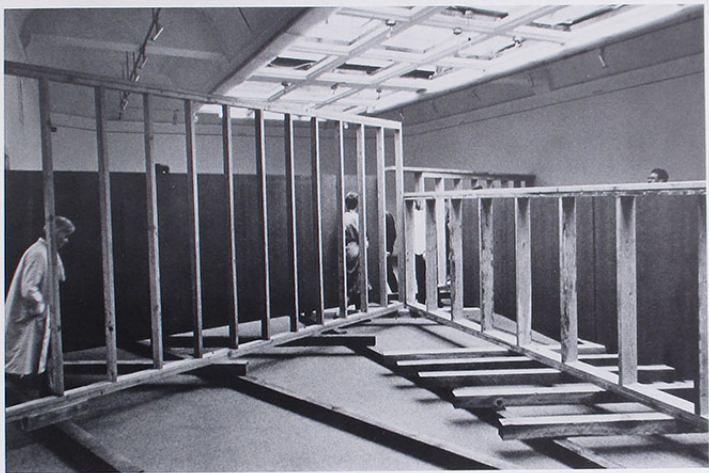
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There is a singer there is a song.



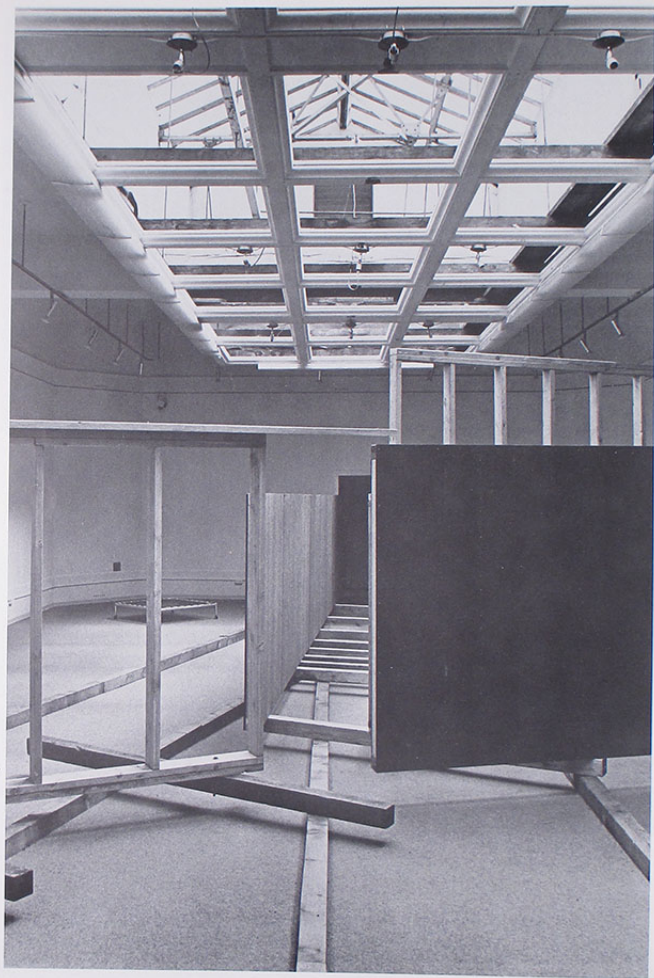
Rebounder in use  
Photo: Zbigniew Ojak

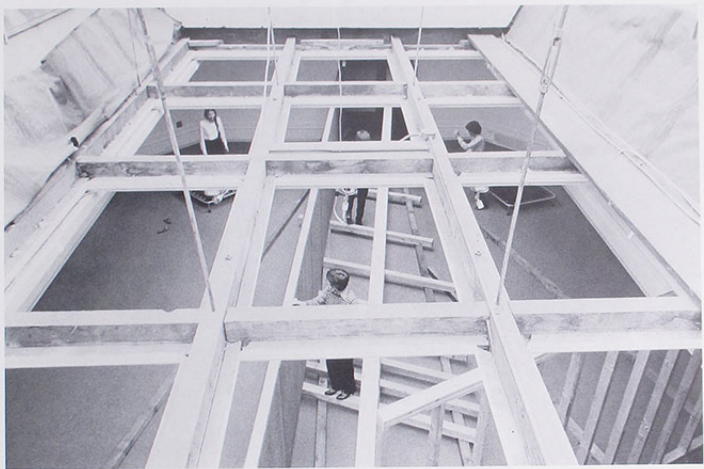




THE NORTH GALLERY







# MOWRY BADEN

*KINHIN*

1979, cedar, fir, steel, aluminum  
8.69 m x 8.69 m x 4.72 m

Now all rationalised into a whole different notation, meaning  
and purpose.

The lady in the gold hat dances because the *tsuzumi* orange silk  
Ropes loosen drum tone glides, his foot shifts  
Balances on its heel. Drum thump: sky-pointing toe  
Switches exactly to the right and stops awhile,  
No more music or dance, only animal breathing harsh  
Half stifled behind lacquer mask whose outside shows  
Calm silent gentle sadness

the whole figure, mask wig golden hat brocade clothes  
white underwear and *tabi* all means something else  
the drum says P L O K the toes of that foot  
Point straight up again.

The figure is monumentally present, no time has passed  
Only that furious hospital, death-ward breath  
Monstrous, apart, static, tense, rooted.

P L O K

drum foot moves back lifts high off the floor as if to stomp  
Comes down silently as the drum P L O K again  
The drummer screams a single word the dancer performs a total  
CONTRACTION

takes a few steps in a circle  
Great green brocade bell (represents a couple tons of bronze  
casting)

lowers itself another two feet from the ceiling the drum  
P L O K the lady's foot moves and stops, a new stop-motion cycle  
Commences, varied now by a few short steps, then  
the old pattern repeated, one drum-controlled movement at a time  
Each motion followed by unendurable stillness and silence  
And this time turning in a circle the lady repeats one word  
five times

And stop when the drum P L O K  
he holds her fan out away from her body  
the angle carefully prescribed  
the smell of burning leaves the  
smell of shaving-soap morning cigaret burning on the ledge  
below the bathroom mirror goose pimple skin of Rome's Adam's  
Apple turkey neck razor gently slow

Philip Whalen, "Birthday Poem"

Decompressions (Grey Fox Press: Bolinas, 1977) pp. 64, 65





Since 1965 I have been building sculptures for a moving participant. *Kin hin* is one of the most recent examples. Movement was also my chief concern when I built *Vancouver Room* (illus. 4) in this same building in May 1973, and in retrospect, the two pieces seem to me remarkably similar.

If I were to cut the bottom half out of *Kin hin* and leave only the upper ramp and studs, I would have a virtual replica of the 1973 piece. Both are canted on a five-degree angle with the low point situated at one corner and the high point at the corner opposite. Once the visitor walks the initial 114 feet of ramp in *Kin hin* and reaches a height of 86" from the floor of the Gallery, he/she enters a structure that is much like *Vancouver Room*.

On the upper plane of *Kin hin*, as in *Vancouver Room*, the visitor climbs about two feet over forty feet of walking, then descends at the same angle over an additional forty feet.<sup>1</sup> This brings the visitor back to the head of the 114 foot ramp. The visitor can then choose either to continue circling the top plane or to return to the gallery floor by means of the ramp.

Though there are obvious similarities between *Vancouver Room* and *Kin hin*, *Vancouver Room* was more naive. It is apparent to me now that its naiveté lay in my attempt to seal it off from the customary uses of the gallery. In *Vancouver Room* I sheathed the skeleton in drywall primarily to enhance the illusion that the tilted space was normal. Though not its prime purpose, the sheathing also removed the visitor momentarily from scrutiny by the guards and other visitors outside the envelope.<sup>2</sup>

This privacy, which seemed a virtue to me then, now strikes me as a weakness, and so in *Kin hin*, I have opted for a situation in which the visitor is exposed to the ambience of the gallery. As a consequence, however, the gestalt is much weaker.

*Vancouver Room* and *Kin hin* both have their source in a type of sculpture that originated in southern California in the late 1960s. Sculptors there were working with alternative spaces that could function within the confines of a conventional gallery yet envelope the visitor in a self-contained structure with its own physical and perceptual properties. In this catalogue I will refer to these structures as "envelope spaces."

Though usually included in the general category of environmental sculpture, envelope spaces are primarily concerned with sensory perception within a specific space, whereas environmental sculpture, like Kurt Schwitters' *Merzbau*, contains objects of an evocative or symbolic nature.<sup>3</sup> Like the envelope sculpture, environmental sculpture may also enclose the visitor in a self-contained space, but envelope sculpture dispenses with the evocative and symbolic contents associated with environmental work and emphasizes instead the perception of perception itself. The only "object" of any significance in the envelope sculpture is oneself.

To my mind, the first envelope spaces represented a self-conscious attempt to create a separate world, suitable for refined perceptual experiences; but there was also something else at work: a conscious desire to escape from the overbearing banality of the modern art gallery.

Is it any wonder the envelope artists wanted to wash their hands of the gallery environment? Few art galleries today have much architectural character, and, what's more, it is patently apparent that the architect and the artist have no sense of a common enterprise. Most art galleries in North America, including the Vancouver Art Gallery, strive merely for a neutral look, one that will not compete with the art. The envelope presented itself as a viable sculptural alternative to those neutered architectural spaces.

Most envelope artists were satisfied with making their own sequestered spaces, ones that were visually and sometimes acoustically sealed off from the surrounding gallery. While this vision had obvious advantages for the artist, it lacked social dimension in that the artists made no attempt to incorporate or even acknowledge the visitor's habitual responses to the gallery. Since it reduced the gallery to a vestibule, the envelope had little or no effect on the customary social uses of the institution. However, two artists — Michael Asher and Michael Brewster — saw the precariousness of such a hermetic proposition and immediately incorporated the gallery into their work.

1. "Within the boundary is a walking path. I build it right next to the wall and it is two feet wide. Its plan is clear. Every step travels in my mind before the journey begins. I lean into this task and my first step breaks the fall. Any clear sculpture will be a behavior of this kind: a plan for movement."

"Mowry Baden," *Vanguard*, May 1973, p. 4.

2. To the dismay of the preparator, children often stepped off the ramp to frolic unobserved in the sawdust "infield." The gallery would then close the piece temporarily while Max Dean and Peter Prince smoothed the sawdust with a large wooden screed. Thus the Vancouver Art Gallery kept the piece open to all and dealt patiently with the consequences unlike the National Gallery, which feared damage suits from the public and thus demanded signed waivers from those who wished to walk through *Ottawa Room*, a piece I contributed to the 1980 Pluralities exhibition. Since only those above the age of 19 are legally qualified to sign a waiver, the effect was to discriminate against children.

3. This form emerged first in Europe, but by the 1960s American sculptors were also pursuing an environmental idiom. The first work of this kind that I saw was Herbert Ferber's environmental space exhibited at the Whitney Museum in 1961. For a thorough treatment of environmental sculpture and West Coast envelope spaces, see Germano Celant, *Ambiente Arte Dal Futurismo alla Body Art* (Venice Edizioni La Biennale di Venezia, 1977).

I saw the California envelope space as represented by the work of Michael Asher and Larry Bell for the first time in 1969 at the Museum of Modern Art in a show called "Spaces," which also included an environmental work by Robert Morris. I remember being very excited at the time, particularly by the Asher work, which had a tranquillizing effect created by the artist's manipulation of the acoustic properties of the space. These properties were enhanced by the absence of furnishings and the presence of piped-in white noise.

Hal Glicksman, then curator of the Pomona College Art Gallery in Claremont, California, was an enthusiastic supporter of this kind of work, and Michael Asher, along with other early practitioners like Robert Irwin, Lloyd Hamrol, Tom Etherton and Michael Brewster, did major installations at the gallery in 1970 and 1971. I was teaching there at the time and had ample opportunity to see the work firsthand.

The Etherton work was definitely an envelope piece. (Illus. 5) Structurally, it had no reference to the gallery framework. Asher's piece also had its own ceiling, walls and floor. However, Asher altered the customary access to the gallery by removing the doors so that sounds, air currents and visitors could enter the envelope twenty-four hours a day. (Illus. 6) Brewster altered the space in a non-visual way by embedding tiny electronic noisemakers in the walls, placed so that their random "clicking" set up a continually changing criss-cross pattern of sound in the room. I watched visitors move from one spot to another, perceiving new sound arrays as they changed position in the room.

I was fascinated with the envelope spaces, and when I came across Ittleson's drawings of a distorted room designed for experimental purposes by the perceptual psychologist, Adelbert Ames, (Illus. 7) I saw a way to mingle my concerns with those of the envelope builders.<sup>4</sup>

To my mind, Ames had discovered the perfect envelope — a space that had its own extravagant perceptual properties and an enchanting populist reference to funhouse rooms. However, Ames's demonstration was designed for a passive participant. I wanted an active one. I wanted to capture the feeling of what it would be like to move through such a space; and in my first envelope piece, which I gratefully titled *Adelbert's Bet*, (Illus. 8) I tried to create a space, like Ames's which had no visual cues to the radical tilt of the floor.

When *Adelbert's Bet* opened in 1971 at California State College at Los Angeles, I watched visitors sway and teeter at the doorway when they emerged, a sign that they had adjusted to the unique perceptual properties of the envelope and were now having a moment's trouble re-adjusting to the normal gallery space.<sup>5</sup> Though this indicated that the piece was working, it had a humorous side as well because, for some visitors, the experience was too slight to rise to consciousness, and, while teetering in the doorway, they would ask when I was going to install some sculpture or paintings.

Actually, this was not an unusual response to the envelope spaces. The envelope sculptors treated the perception of perception as a very serious concern and were not, in the main, set upon producing a knock-over experience. The work stimulated the most remote fringes of the human sensorium, and to get the full hit, the visitor had to be alert and take very careful account of the shifting character of the internal mechanisms of perception.

Being alert, in any urban context, is no easy matter, and I'm sure that many visitors passed through the envelope spaces without much conscious response because the artist was relying on the visitor to pay close attention to unaccustomed areas of perception. I know that my own envelope spaces made a similar demand and that demand was not always met. People would dodge into the space, take a quick look around and move on, probably dissatisfied.

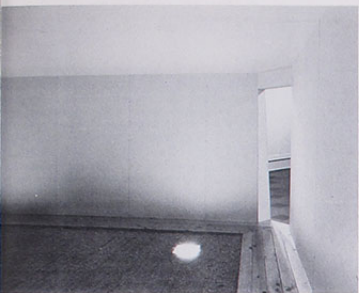
I don't see this as a shortcoming in the work but simply a correlative of an aesthetic experience that demands close perceptual attention. However, when I was invited to build the 1973 piece in Vancouver, I discovered a way to enhance the effect by increasing the visitor's walking time in the space. I doubled the walking distance and thus extended the duration of the visitor's exposure to the experience.

I was satisfied with this improvement and happy with the visitors' movements in the room. The sculpture was also successful in persuading the visitor that the surrounding architecture was distorted, but I noticed while walking around in it myself and looking out through its single doorway that not only the gallery architecture but also visitors outside the envelope looked strange, as though they were standing on a sloping floor. From inside the envelope, the world outside looked like a movie. Although visitors appeared to be climbing uphill, they moved effortlessly. And when I passed through the open door and glanced back into the envelope I'd just left, it too looked strange.<sup>6</sup>

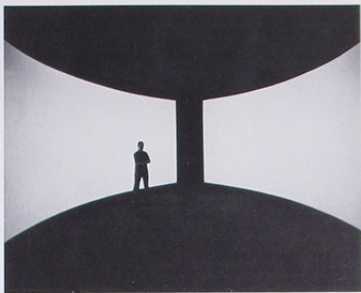
4. William H. Ittleson, *The Ames Demonstrations in Perception* (New York: Hafner, 1968) pp. 183, 189.

5. Actually, *Adelbert's Bet* had two openings, one at either end of a twenty-foot ramp which ran up the centre of the sculpture. Once inside, visitors could not look back at the gallery vestibule because the first opening was screened by a baffle. Climbing up the ramp, the visitor reached the other opening (the size of a door) and found it completely glazed. Through the glazed opening the visitor could see the rear of the gallery. The visual cues the visitor was experiencing inside the sculpture made the space outside appear distorted. It appeared to slope downhill away from the visitor, but because of the glass, the visitor was unable to verify or disprove the illusion.

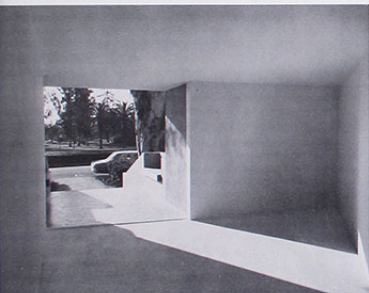
6. "These rooms that are my preoccupation seem more and more like overblown excuses for a doorway. A place to have no place. A doorway is just that. Neither inside nor outside. Nature's everywhere with only doorways in between." "Mowry Baden," *op. cit.*, p. 4.



4  
Mowry Baden, Vancouver Room,  
Wood, drywall, sawdust, incandescent lights,  
20' x 20' x 10' high  
Photo: the artist



5  
Tom Etherton, Rise, 1970  
Pomona College 18' x 36' x 12' height  
Photo: Frank Thomas



6  
Michael Asher, Pomona College Project, 1970  
Wood, drywall  
Photo: Frank Thomas

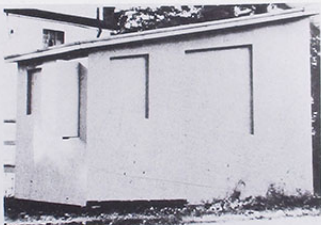
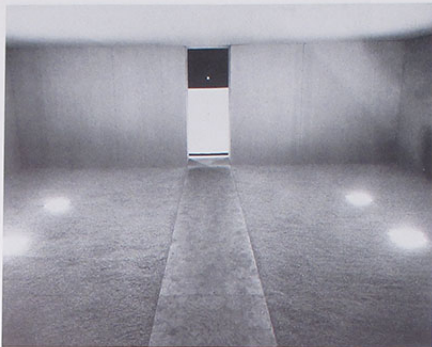


Fig. 13B.1. The full size monocular  
distorted room, exterior view.



Fig. 13B.2. The full size monocular  
distorted room from the viewing point.

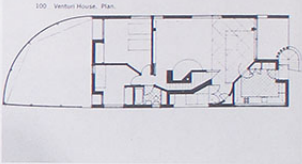
7  
Adelbert Ames, full size monocular  
distorted room from the viewing point, 1940  
Standard construction materials  
10' x 15' 11" x 10' 5 1/2" height



8  
Mowry Baden, *Adelbert's Bet*, 1971  
Wood, drywall, 20' x 20' x 10' height  
Photo: Frank Thomas

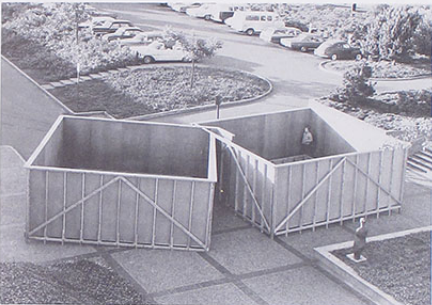


99 House for Mrs. Robert Venturi, Chestnut Hill, Pennsylvania,  
by Venturi and Short, 1962-64, Entrance facade

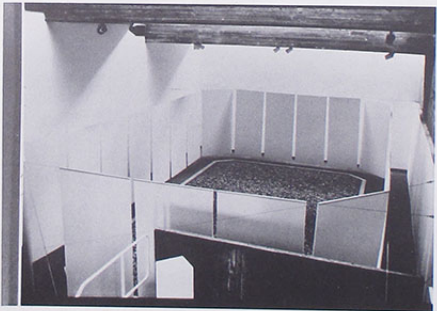


100 Venturi House, Plan

9  
Venturi and Short  
House for Mrs. Robert Venturi  
Chestnut Hill, Pennsylvania,  
1962-64, Entrance facade



10  
Mowry Baden, *U.B.C. Rooms*, 1974  
Wood, particle board, muslin, scrim,  
46' x 30' x 10' height  
Photo: the artist



11  
Mowry Baden, *S.F.A.I.*, 1976  
Wood, rock, steel cable, 1" foam insulation  
panels, 30' x 40' x 6' height  
Photo: the artist



The reality of my envelope space was questioning the reality of the gallery and vice versa. While one space felt level, the other looked skewed. The effect on the architecture was ironic, and intentionally so, but it was also transient and fragile. I had gone to enormous trouble with the structure to bring the effect about, and I remember feeling frustrated that so much careful preparation on my part had produced such a minor impact on the gallery. It was like leading an unwilling partner into a dubious enterprise.

At the same time, I was surprised by the effect that the envelope had on my perception of visitors in the external gallery and realized that, socially, the two spaces were not separate from one another, as I had thought. I had been so intent on the visitor's relationship to the sculpture and on the sculpture's relationship to the gallery that I failed to foresee that my carefully enclosed space might have a social dimension.

Though this result was unexpected, I thought it was interesting and even desirable. I knew that the gallery represses interaction between visitors, and I was unhappy with the social aspects of the gallery's customary uses. However, I was still attached to the idea of the envelope as a perceptual apparatus that could also comment on the gallery architecture, and in subsequent work I neglected to capitalize on my new insight into the work's social potential. I was satisfied, for the time being, to go on playing the sensitive ironist in search of comic relief.

Like other envelope artists, I was also enamoured of inexpensive materials as an ironic counterpoint to the grandiose ponderousness of the art gallery. At that time, most envelope sculptors favored studs and drywall: elements drawn from the cheapest, mass-produced shelter in the culture, the balloon-frame house. In many cases, this was also a matter of economic necessity, but the artists turned necessity to positive uses and deliberately abandoned the pretentiousness of earlier, better-funded forms.

Vincent Scully, commenting on Robert Venturi's family house (Illus. 9) reminds us of similar circumstantial restraints in architecture:

The new architect is standing up in the poverty of his time to confront the comparatively affluent master, and he is fighting to put that very limitation to use if he can. So he dumps the building on the ground: no expensive terrace. No shingles either: too expensive too, as we noted before. If so, then let the house be made, or appear to be made, of cardboard, like the rickety cardboard models beloved by Kahn. Indeed, let the house look like a model, the dream of a house, the absurdity of Le Corbusier's "rêve à deux millions," ironically acknowledged.<sup>7</sup>

Between 1973 and 1976, I made three more envelope spaces in which I relied almost exclusively on inexpensive materials. I built the first piece at the University of British Columbia in the fall of 1974, another at the University of Victoria in February of 1975, and the third at the Otis Art Institute in September of 1975.

The UBC and UVIC rooms were located outdoors, and they could barely be called rooms, much less buildings. The ceilings were of permeable cloth; the walls, of unprotected wood. They wouldn't have satisfied Vitruvius, who required three things of architecture: "commodity, firmness and delight."

The natural light was one terrific bonus in working outdoors since I didn't have to put lights inside the space or suspend them above it as I had done at Otis.

The richest of these pieces was the one at UBC because it had two fabricated architectural spaces which were identical except that one was tilted and one was level. This arrangement gave the experience greater duration and precision.

However, I had not resolved the question of the envelope's relationship to the surrounding social environment. I was still bent on providing a perceptual experience as yet unenriched by a social dimension, and, to refine the physical experience, I added the second room, a level space over whose perceptual properties I had complete control. However, this had the effect of pushing the social world further off. It strikes me now that this was a hopeless attempt to defend the experience from external "contamination" by means of a potentially endless regression of spaces. No matter how many boxes upon boxes I built, eventually the visitor would have to re-enter the world. (Illus. 10)

From the fall of 1975 to early 1976, my doubts about the envelope space became more concrete, and I set about exploring alternatives. By July, I had completed SFAI, an installation at the Art Institute in San Francisco. (Illus. 11)

There I suspended twenty-five feather-light styrofoam panels from cables that stretched around the perimeter of the room. The panels were so light that a walking visitor created a turbulence sufficiently strong to make the panels sway in and out. There were three entrances to the sculpture, and from both inside and outside the work, visitors could observe each other's movements and behavior. They could even collaborate by walking on either side of the suspended wall, thereby doubling the turbulence.

The mystery of the doorway had evaporated; the walls were reduced to fragile, moving screens, and the architecture and social ambience of the gallery were starting to become joint factors in the work. At the time, I commented in my journal:

No matter how obvious the veneer, the room always has mystery. . . . It's also pleasant to watch others walk through it. This is the first time I've liked watching someone else using a work of mine.<sup>8</sup>

7. Vincent Scully, *The Shingle Style Today or The Historian's Revenge* (New York: Braziller, 1974) p. 31.

8. Journal entry, 1 July 1976.



Other artists were also finding ways to overcome the inertia of the gallery. That same year (1976) I saw/heard a work by Michael Brewster at the Roger Wong Gallery in Los Angeles that impressed me with its unusual clarity and transparency. (illus. 12) Brewster had introduced a sound that pulled the space so close to my body that the vibrations shook my pantlegs. He had done virtually nothing to the architecture of the existing room except to clear it of furniture and paintings. Yet, by moving around in the space, an active viewer could discover discrete and almost palpable areas of intense sound and relative silence.

I was also impressed by Paul Waszink's piece at the San Francisco Art Institute in May of 1977, another work of extraordinary clarity. (illus. 13) Again, without altering the existing architecture, Waszink intensified the visitor's appreciation of his/her own size and scale in relation to the space by lifting the visitor up off the floor by means of ramps and a stair. Another nice effect of the Waszink piece occurred when two visitors collaborated by mounting the stair and one of the two ramps at the same time and stood facing each other. Because of the architecture, they couldn't maintain eye contact at this elevation.

In the spring of 1974, Roland Brener built a maze of waist-high barriers at the Vancouver Art Gallery that also achieved its effect without any modification of the gallery architecture. (illus. 14) Viewed from its perimeter, Brener's construction functioned as a large dimensional drawing. Viewed from within, it became a complex series of imperatives for movement.

Another important influence at that time came from a show of paintings by Stephen Davis at Hansen Fuller Gallery in San Francisco (1976). (illus. 15) What Steve says about that work matches my memory of the experience:

I was consciously trying to make objects that were in equilibrium with where they were located. The desire was to make paintings that would allow (people to sense themselves as) classicizing instruments, as makers of) mean and measure, in relation to a location. Delivering color into the negotiation was metaphorical too; trying to allow for the heart and the skin. My memory of that show was that people looked around a lot and that the paintings made everything in the space stand up. It wasn't too comfortable and I think it might have been hard to fall asleep in there.<sup>9</sup>

Since I was building sculptures for a moving visitor, I was inspired by these artists, who demonstrated that it was possible to influence the visitor's movement and attention within a circumscribed space and yet dispense with the envelope. By the spring of 1976, I was working outdoors trying to achieve similar results by getting the visitor to move in an alert and precise way through unenclosed land and vegetation.

In early May of 1977, I visited the Fort Mason grounds in San Francisco with Stephen Davis. We lingered on the south side of the complex near the entrance, where an enormous concrete retaining wall rises from the ground in giant steps. We scrambled breathlessly up the wall of cement and at the top found a little plateau of ground dotted with the low, wild vegetation typical of the northern California coast.

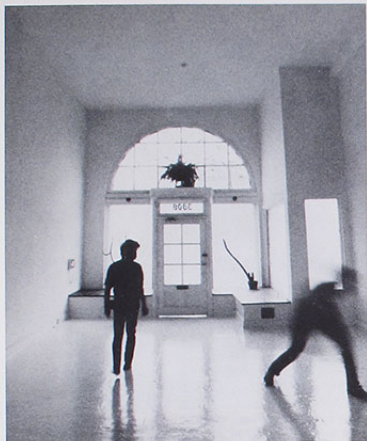
Below us stretched an acre of asphalt and a low building dwarfed by our high vantage point. We talked about the effects of intensive building programs on existing landforms, flora and fauna, and soon we were planning a large work that would involve him putting color on the concrete retaining wall and me making sculpture that would involve tearing up the asphalt to allow the local vegetation to re-establish itself and installing a vast grid over the entire acre a foot above the ground so that visitors could move freely across its surface without disturbing the plants. Steve's color would be visible from anywhere on the grid and from several elevated "stations." The combination of color and movement would intensify the visitor's perception of the visual and political alternatives represented by the military compound, the sea beyond and the surrounding city.

It was an ambitious conception and obviously one that would never be realized, but I was still thinking about the Fort Mason experience when I returned to Victoria in the fall (1977) and resumed work on *Layritz Field* (illus. 16), a piece with walkways that lifted the visitor a few inches off the surface of the ground and a platform that increased the visitor's elevation several feet where the platform jutted out from the hillside.

I covered the walking surface with sod from a nearby field. Though the sheep kept the sod trimmed, I had problems keeping it alive. The first summer dried it out, and the wet B.C. winter restored it, but the second summer killed it off.

While working on *Layritz Field*, I was also thinking about a sculpture I intended to build on a piece of ground I had acquired for the purpose of Comptche, California. (illus. 17) The site is covered with Redwood groves, interspersed with salal, canyon oak, huckleberry and poison oak. Considering my experience with *Layritz Field* and still thinking about the vision of an open walking surface over natural vegetation, I decided to abandon my original envelope ideas about the Comptche space and in the summer of 1978, I began erecting a 200-foot long elevated aluminum grid walkway (now nearly finished) which would allow the foliage to sustain its natural growth and the walker to look down on the small plants below and also view the larger trees from a level substantially above grade.

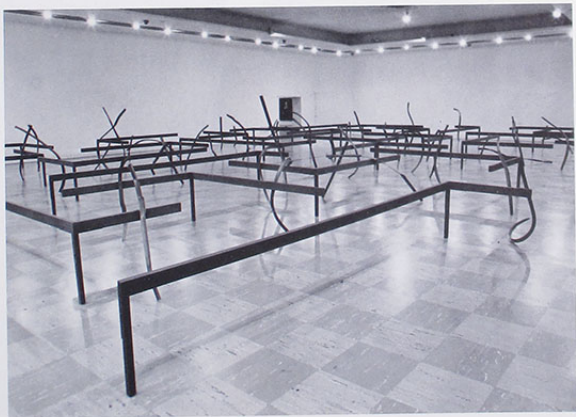
9. Stephen Davis in a letter to the author, 2 February 1982.



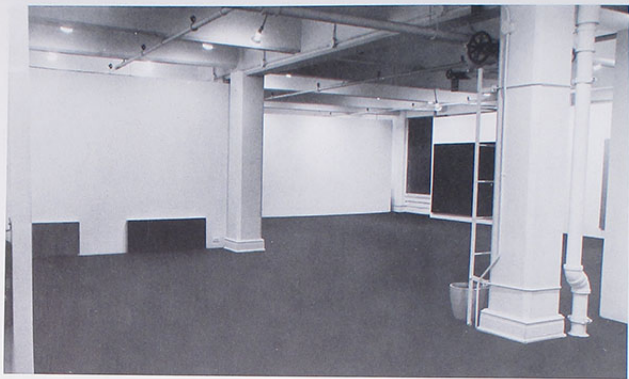
12  
Michael Brewster, *Narrow Open Spaces*,  
an acoustic sculpture, April, 1976, Roger Wong Gallery,  
Los Angeles. A 74 hertz tone at 100 c decibels  
in resonance with the room cavity caused roughly  
concentric rings of narrow open spaces.  
Photo, the artist



13  
Paul Waszink, *Installation* at San Francisco  
Art Institute, Spring 1977. Wood, with rubber  
sheet surface, tallest ramp 3' 6" height  
Photo, the artist



14  
Roland Brener, *Installation* at the Vancouver Art  
Gallery, 1974. Wood, steel, 70' x 50' x 16' height



15  
Stephen Davis, *Installation view*  
Hansen Fuller Gallery 1976



16  
Mowry Baden, *Layritz Field*, 1977  
Wood, concrete, sod, 260' long  
Photo, the artist



17  
Mowry Baden, *Comptche* (under construction)  
Aluminum, stainless steel, 200' x 2' x 10' height

I was pleased with the experience of walking through the forest at an elevated level and eventually translated that conception to *Kinhin* and *Ottawa Room* (illus. 18) at the National Gallery, both of which bring the walking visitor to a position substantially above the gallery floor. Of course, there is no forest in the National Gallery or the Vancouver Art Gallery (worse luck). There is only some very impoverished architecture.

In *Kinhin*, in *Ottawa Room*, and in the piece I did at 80 Langton Street, I made no attempt to screen the visitor from the existing gallery. (illus. 19) The 80 Langton Street space is cavernous and heavily timbered, and I added only a few more timbers and some concrete speed bumps on the floor, the very least I could do and still involve a moving visitor in a physical experience related to the dimensions of the space. *Ottawa Room*, which came later, was not an envelope either. It was a skeletal structure, which, among other things, gave the visitor many elevated vantage points from which to view the surrounding (and debased) architecture.

From some vantage points the gestalt of the sculpture would override that of the room that contained it. Standing on the floor and scanning the area from either end of the sculpture, the attentive visitor would notice that the surrounding architectural structure looked out of plumb while the skeleton of the sculpture (which was actually tilted) appeared to be vertical.

I had hoped that this phenomenon would occur from any vantage point in the piece, but unfortunately it remained a minor and subtle effect apparent from only a limited number of positions. By contrast, *Kinhin* has more than a mild effect on the surrounding architecture, especially when the visitor is looking through all of the uprights at the North wall, and conversely, towards the main entrance of the Gallery.

*Kinhin* originated in May, 1977 with a plan to build a sculpture at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. I spent that summer working outdoors on the site at Comptche and trying to conceive of a piece that would index with the beaux-arts interior spaces of the SFMMA building on Van Ness Avenue. This project remained alive for two and a half years, and though I completed the sculpture in late December 1979, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art never did exhibit it, and it has been in storage in my barn ever since.

The first elevated space drawings in my journal go back to the late summer of 1977. I remember struggling to build an elevated structure that would relate to the Layritz sculpture, but this turned out to be an enormous waste of time, and I abandoned the project within a few months. Nevertheless, the impetus remained, and I made a series of drawings that were really an amalgamation of the Layritz project, *Comptche* and what was the very beginning of *Kinhin*.

By February of 1978, the drawings were more specific: they showed two levels and a spiral access from one to the other. I must have begun the model for *Kinhin* that spring because the drawings in the journal at that time show that I had appropriated three ramp elements from the *Comptche* sculpture and these, I remember, were part of the model.

In the late summer of 1979, I bought the cedar and fir for *Kinhin*. I had been cutting and welding aluminum fasteners as well. In December, I laid out all the parts in the shop at the University of Victoria and started assembling them. My journal notes are chiefly concerned with details of improvements and cautions for installation. However, the following assessment is interesting:

At this point, it looks like something quite different than I expected. I am surprised that there is as little action on the ground floor as there is. I expected a much stronger body/sight split. As it is, the experience is very quiet and about something else.<sup>10</sup>

Take your pick of the symbolic evocations in *Kinhin*: tower, lookout, ziggurat, Stupa, elevated atrium, stockade. Of these, I prefer Stupa. (illus. 20) At Sanchi, the monks circumambulate the great Stupa, slowly walking around it at different levels. The name *Kinhin* comes from the Japanese Zen practice of walking meditation. At bottom, however, *Kinhin* is an attempt to come to terms with the problem of sustaining the visitor's physical and perceptual energies in the context of the art gallery, where the atmosphere tends to repress movement and spontaneity.

*Kinhin* also contains the potential for social involvement in the work. In a situation that is physically active and visually restrained, as *Kinhin* is, visitors are free to create their own instant society, and I can imagine the possible taunts, cautions and exchanges that will occur between those on the top plane, those on the floor and those on the ramp that spirals its way around the entire sculpture. Unfortunately, real and imagined embarrassment will also be a factor. However, if there is humor here it will arise from self-imposed restraint.

10. Journal entry, 1 January 1980.



As the cat  
climbed over  
the top of  
the jamcloset  
first the right  
forefoot  
carefully  
then the hind  
stepped down  
into the pit of  
the empty  
flowerpot

William Carlos Williams, "Poem"<sup>11</sup>

Some anxious visitors may shrink from climbing the structure at all, for fear they might do it "wrong," but I hope there won't be too many of these because they will miss a lot. (I'm afraid I have no answers for the absurdly self-conscious and no apology for the fact that these sculptures reveal the gestures of the visitor.)

Climbing is certainly part of it. In a play called *The Lost Ones*, Samuel Beckett refers to another elevating device — the ladder:

These ladders are in great demand. At the foot of each at all times or nearly a little queue of climbers. And yet it takes courage to climb. For half the rungs are missed and this without regard to harmony. If only every second one were missing no great harm would be done. But, the want of three in a row calls for acrobatics. These ladders are nevertheless in great demand and in no danger of being reduced to mere uprights runged at their extremities alone. For the need to climb is too widespread.<sup>12</sup>

As a matter of choice, I have usually opted for an outcome that has minimum visual impact, favoring instead the experience of physical movement. So *Kinhin* is not an extravagant structure. There are no exotic part-to-part relationships. What visual interest there is will arise from the relationship of this structure to the room in which it stands, and I do not expect much from that since tilting with impoverished architecture is not an especially ravishing experience.

But any space is potentially interesting. To say otherwise would be to deny the visitor's capacity to enliven his/her world moment by moment. It is the passivity of the visitor in the gallery space that presents a particular problem. Anyone can watch the immediate change in gesture and stride as people enter this carpeted sanctorum. The hushed reverence that descends stalls movement and deadens the visitor's capacity to remain alert. The visitor assumes the stance of an inferior, bowing before the art that is enthroned there. Ironically, the art is also pushed back by this situation and struggles vainly to turn the tide, to restore the visitor to himself/herself as a living, moving, choosing organism.

Outdoor spaces are less constraining. People entering my recent outdoor sculptures at Irvine (1979) and Santa Barbara (1981) hardly break stride. (Illus. 21, 22) Since both sites are steep ones, the physical impetus is already there, and the sculpture incorporates that, expands it and gives precision and detail to the visitor's moment by moment experience of the work.

In the gallery, this is harder to do, but rather than retreat from it, I have tried to face its repressive quality directly.

For better or worse, I have given up the envelope in favor of social spontaneity and a direct exchange between visitors in movement and the surrounding space, however banal and constraining. I am again reminded of Beckett and a conversation in *Endgame*:

CLOV I'll leave you. I have things to do.  
HAMM In your kitchen?  
CLOV Yes.  
HAMM What, I'd like to know?  
CLOV I look at walls.<sup>13</sup>

Mowry Baden

Victoria, British Columbia, February 1982. With grateful acknowledgement to Judith Aldritt for her help in preparing this essay.

11. William Carlos Williams, "Poem," *Selected Poems* (New York: New Directions, 1968) p. 54.

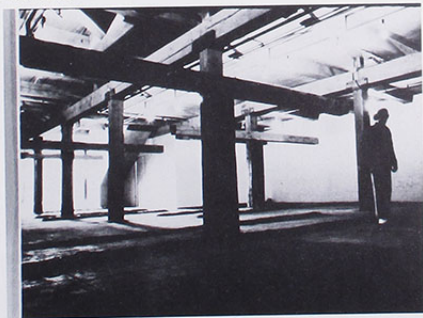
12. Samuel Beckett, *The Lost Ones*, translated by the author (London: Calder & Boyars, 1972) p. 7.

13. Samuel Beckett, *Endgame*, (London: Faber and Faber paperback, 1969) p. 17





18  
Mowry Baden, *Ottawa Room*, 1980. Cedar, fir, steel,  
26' x 48' x 23' height  
Photo, Ernest Mayer



19  
Mowry Baden, *80 Langton Street*, 1978  
Wood, concrete, 70' x 50' x 12' height  
Photo, Robert Winter

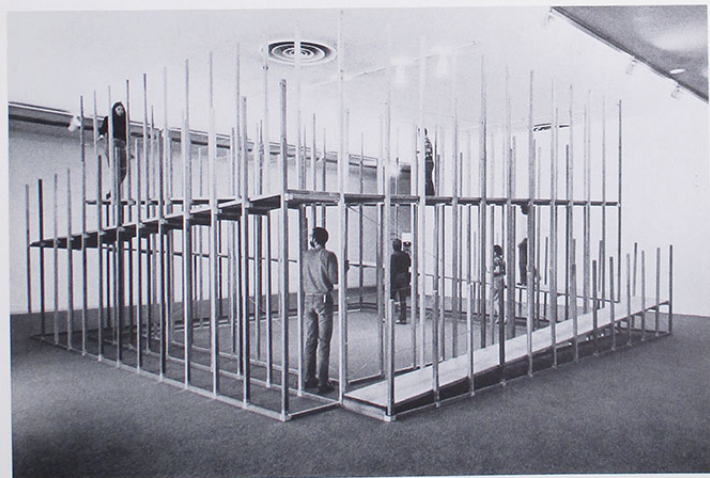
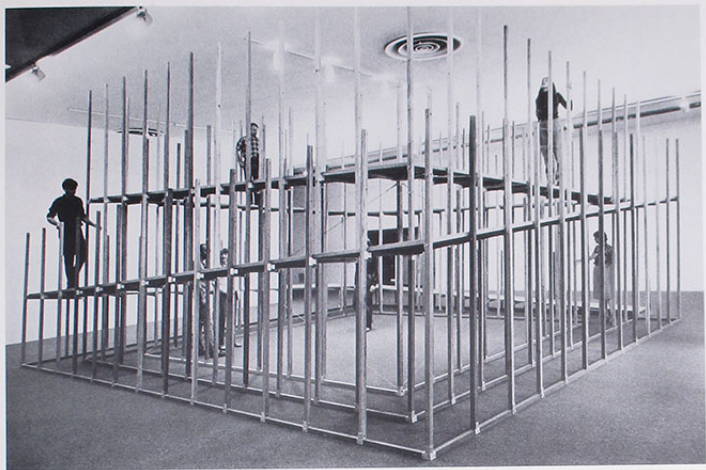
20  
General view of Stupa 1, Sanchi, India  
130' dia. x 55' height



21  
Mowry Baden, Wild Celery  
for Stephen Davis, 1979  
University of California at Irvine  
Steel, concrete, ramps total 220' long  
Photo: Graham Crawford

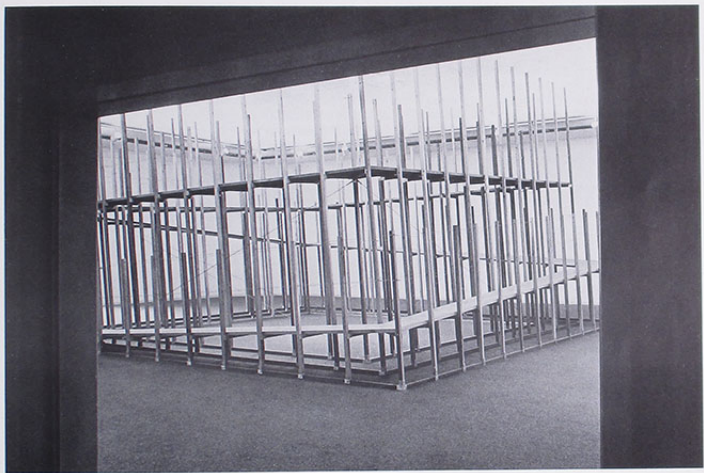


22  
Mowry Baden, Santa Barbara, 1981  
University of California at Santa Barbara  
Rock, aluminum, concrete, wood, 55' x 8' height  
Photo: Wayne McCall











# ROLAND BRENER

## AMNESIA

*(Forgotten Objects and Sounds from  
The Basement of The Vancouver Art Gallery)*

1982, found objects, mixed media  
East Gallery, 17.73 m x 12.42 m

## MARTIN BARTLETT

*Sound Shadows*

1982, found tapes, electronic circuitry

"This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress."

Walter Benjamin<sup>1</sup>

Aby Warburg, one of the great heroes of twentieth century thought, was in a position to compare the world before and after the advent of the telephone. In general, he came to feel that the new communications systems, which were just appearing in the early years of this century, eroded the possibilities for thought. "The... creation of distance between the self and the external world may be called the fundamental act of civilization."<sup>2</sup> Distance, for Warburg, was essential to the establishment of the space that mythopoetic and symbolic thought require. Modern communications "destroy distance" and by doing so, "telegram and telephone destroy the cosmos".<sup>3</sup>

In many ways Roland Brener's work for *Mise en scène, Amnesia* is about the erosion of distance. In 1982 "the past" is 1956, in 1982 the past extended to Biblical times. A dictionary defines amnesia as, "loss of memory". According to a certain nineteenth century psychological position, "memory is not a property of consciousness but the one quality which distinguishes living from dead matter."<sup>4</sup> One of the main interrogations the viewer of *Amnesia* will experience concerns memory.

In order to make this piece Brener selected found objects from The Vancouver Art Gallery. Brener has always been very conscious of site. He has always kept the space where the work will be seen in mind as a working factor. For this occasion he chose to explore, almost like an archaeologist, the history of the space — its psychic resonance. Once these objects were found, their initial absurdity — they had been taken from the darkest recesses of the Gallery and were unused to bright light — was dispelled. They demanded to be reckoned with as "form" in Brener's method as a sculptor. This method is syntactic; "My art background has left ingrained in me a habit of striving for some kind of dynamic quality through an opposition of forms."<sup>5</sup> This comes from his St. Martin's training. However, Brener's method has always been one of parataxis as well as syntax (alignment and chaos?). I interpret this aspect of Brener's work, which is present even in his student pieces made from uncut materials "off the shelf", as a personal impulse that has to do with his vision as an artist, not his training. Thus his work often has an "all-over" dynamic — a system of equivalences, as well as the modulations created by weight, balance and dynamic tension.

At various junctures in his career, Brener's concern for the "democratization" of his means, has led him to abandon the manipulation of materials for a "selection" of materials. This entails some risk, as the selected materials will carry with them their own history, identity and name. When the traditional formal vocabulary of sculpture is deployed on these "untouched" materials, there is bound to emerge a struggle of representation between what the materials are in their ordinary context and what they are as sculpture. If the sides in this struggle are unevenly matched, the work will not succeed. It will be unbalanced and slip into bathos. Brener confronts the risk by going to extremes. If objects are highly charged with content and feeling, the formal means must be rigorous and classical.

A work executed for 80 Langton Street in San Francisco in 1979, can be seen as a working out of the methods used in *Amnesia*. Rented scaffolding and available lumber were used to make a construction that incorporated furniture in the gallery. Light and shadow were used as a unifying, almost drawing-like element, which included the dynamic presence of the viewer.

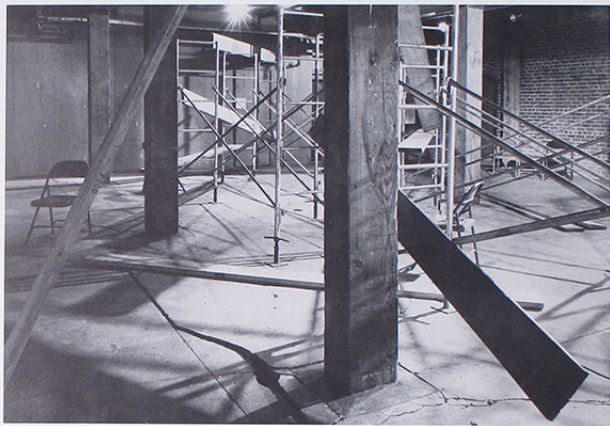
1. "Theses on the Philosophy of History" *Illuminations*, translated by Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969) pp 257-258

2. E.H. Gombrich, *Aby Warburg: An Intellectual Biography* (London: Warburg Institute, 1970) p. 288

3. *ibid.* p. 225

4. *ibid.* p. 239

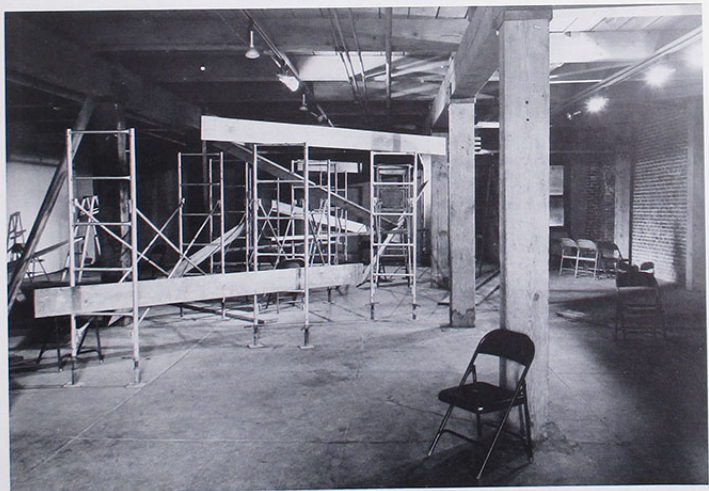
5. Stratford Art Gallery, "Roland Brener" (June 4 - September 3, 1979) p. 6



60 Langton Street, 1979



80 Langton Street, 1979



80 Langton Street, 1979

The objects in *Amnesia* were not content to act as lumps of dead material. They had memory and they activate memory. They are more restless and sensitive than rented scaffolding and found lumber, both of which have an open potential. "I felt, on the one hand, like I was dealing with the spirits of bygone presences and, on the other hand, that they are just objects. There is something precious about them — something spiritual. They are a bit scary, in a way, to push around. They have a mark of someone else on them."<sup>6</sup> They began to have a hand in dictating the piece. The title was found in a box of gold-painted plaster letters. In short, these found objects minor relics of museology, quickly lost their awkwardness and began to plead their case. They contain memory, they have history and are symbolic of that history. The innocent piles of cushions will remind one of the days in the late 60's when the Gallery sponsored performance arts (Yvonne Rainer, John Juliani, Gathie Falk and Tom Graff et al). The panels on chrome stands have rebelled and insist on a lumbering presence which indicates gesture and perhaps the desire to speak.

The objects tell us much about distance and forgetting. Brener has used them to make arrangements that are uncanny in their resemblance to "classic" Brener. However, he has taken care to ennoble them as well. He wished them their moment. As "things we have forgotten" they have much to say to those who forget. They brought forward in Brener a meditation on "cultural amnesia". At one point each of these objects had cultural meaning and function. However, they are now (or were) "trapped in a kind of limbo because they cannot be discarded but they cannot be remembered because they must make way for the new".<sup>7</sup> The objects, once the dust was cleaned from them, had something to say about a large subject — progress.

"There is this belief that we are experiencing things for the first time, but that's because we have forgotten." Have we been conditioned to forget? "We only assimilate history through a very tight programme." We are in danger of being without a past. The ashtray is still an ashtray, the frame, a frame and they show us how we once expected ordinary things to look. Our expectations have changed and we know they will change again. This desire for incessant change and erasure has serious consequences. Our cities are torn down and rebuilt every twenty years providing, it would seem, less rather than more human comfort with each campaign. This demand "to make it new"<sup>8</sup> has been often blamed on the avant-garde.<sup>9</sup> Yet no one has ever established that the avant-garde has had more than a superficial effect on general culture. The desire for change is not innate, it has been created by interested parties. It is the basis of our economy.

But, as the sharp poignancy of the objects in *Amnesia* tells us; if we cannot remember we cannot imagine place as history and if we cannot do that — perhaps — to refer back to the nineteenth century theory of memory — we are dead.

Into this crisis of content Brener introduces the viewer. All the objects, configurations of objects, are lit from the floor — footlights from the theatre. They cast shadows on the wall which is thereby activated as a cycloramic painting which deals with painterly issues like positive and negative space. The viewer will enter the painting with his or her shadow. Gesture will emerge, it will be the viewer's own. "The viewer projects his own darkness, his own earthly shadow. 'Matter' is transformed into 'abstract' composition, therefore he begins to discard his substantiality and to dissolve. The concreteness of matter is undermined among these objects torn from the gallery basement like objects washed up on a beach — good for nothing, ready to be used for anything".<sup>10</sup>

The viewer will engage in a play of shadows. The shadows, "shades", are perhaps referenced to death, to the very limbo of cultural amnesia which the objects themselves have come from. Other viewers will be lit like objects and also cast shadows. The question of the gesture and its arena will be raised. Under the "radical light" of the gallery spot the viewer will recognize his or her body and its shadow.

According to Artaud, "Every real effigy has a shadow which is its double; and art must falter and fail from the moment the sculptor believes he has liberated the kind of shadow whose very existence will destroy his repose". Shadows do shatter form and Brener does not want repose. The viewer's shadow will upset Brener's fragile arrangements as his active shadow crosses them. However, in this wreckage of form will be the signs of life. Perhaps the viewer, as he destroys the forms of *Amnesia* with his shadow, will rejoin "that which outlives forms and produces their continuation... that fragile, fluctuating centre which forms never reach", that is, "life".<sup>11</sup>

6. Interview with Scott Watson and Lorna Farrell-Ward

7. *op. cit.*, interview

8. Ezra Pound

9. Renato Poggioli, *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*, translated by Gerald Fitzgerald (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard, 1968) p. 209 ff.

10. Lorna Farrell-Ward, notes on *Mise en scène*

11. Antonin Artaud "Preface: The Theatre and Culture", *The Theatre and Its Double* (New York: Grove Press, 1958) pp. 12-13



*Amnesia*, like Brener's previous work, returns its process to the viewer. One can see how it is made, and how it operates. Brener is present as the director of a *mise en scène*, rather than as an absent sculptor with mysterious powers. "A problem that I have with so much modernist work is that by imposing that type of willed expression on the material you de-nature it so that its material qualities, or origin, are subordinated to a degree whereby its history is superceded by a sense of a heroic shaping personality."<sup>12</sup>

But Brener has not abandoned traditional sculptural values. What his intervention — his arranging — means, is then an important question. It is certainly an affirmative gesture, but not mere bravado. Beginning with the fact of place, Brener extends his attention to all the particulars. The shape and size of the room, the history and function of the building. A mood was already present in the gallery he was given to work with — something musty, hazy and "chalky". There was the sound of the air-conditioner: this he asked composer Martin Bartlett to modify (Bartlett chose found sound much as Brener found his objects). And most importantly Brener has included the viewer in the dynamic of the piece. In short, Brener has addressed every aspect of the environment in which his sculptural ideas will be present. There is no neutral environment. Works of art do not exist in hermetic jars, although we are often asked, when considering their permanence, timelessness and spiritual qualities, to see them as outside actuality. Brener returns to actuality and the circumstances of history.

The photographs in the catalogue were taken in Brener's studio and in the Gallery; they demonstrate how highly volatile objects can participate in an integrated whole. This is achieved, in measure by the use of light and shadow. The objects may be various and utterly idiosyncratic but *Amnesia* deploys the unifying power of light (metaphoric of the gaze?). On the flat wall (a privileged site) the shadows enter equivalence where they act as line, form and mass (they look like the shadows more "classic" Brener's would cast). In a way the art has been returned to the wall, but the room is not empty nor is it silent, and the viewer is invited to mingle and look at his own portrait.

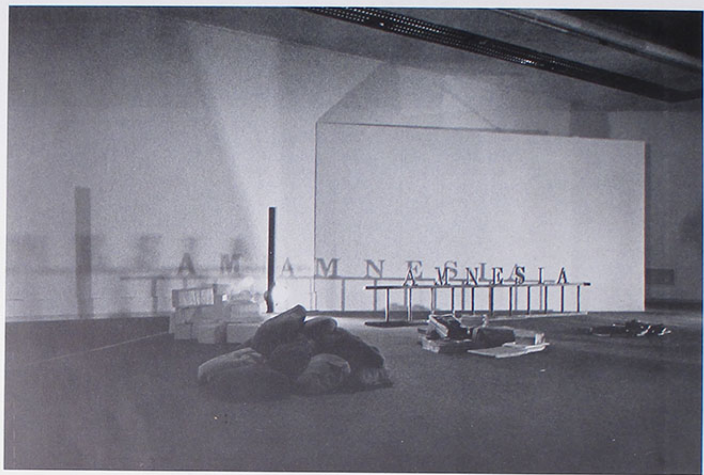
12. Stratford Art Gallery, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

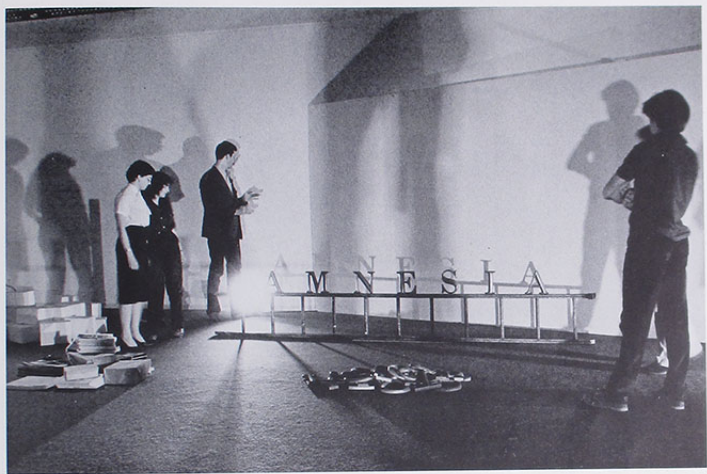
#### MARTIN BARTLETT'S SOUND SHADOWS

Bartlett has used the occasion of Brener's *Amnesia*, which he sees as "a set in which the visitor to the space is the actor"<sup>1</sup> to make a sound piece which echoes Brener's concerns. The gallery already has a sound. An air-conditioning system dating from 1951 is quite loud. Bartlett has used the frequency of the system as a given. To this he has added "found" sound from tapes in the Vancouver Art Gallery archives. The sound has a "shadowy" quality and will, like Brener's configurations, be disturbed by viewer movement.

1. In conversation

Scott Watson  
Curator







Studio

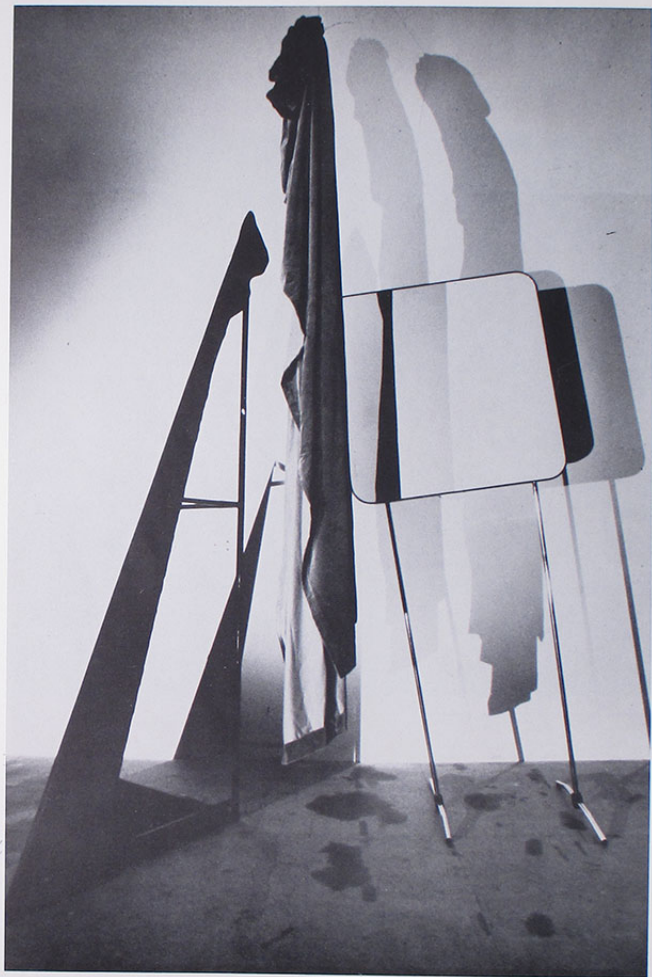


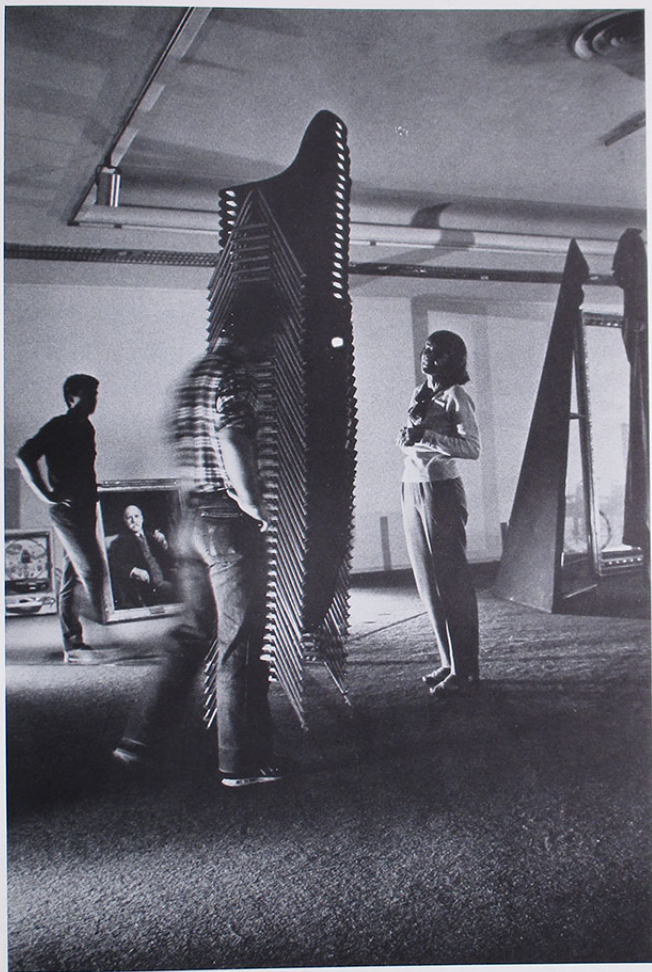




Studio





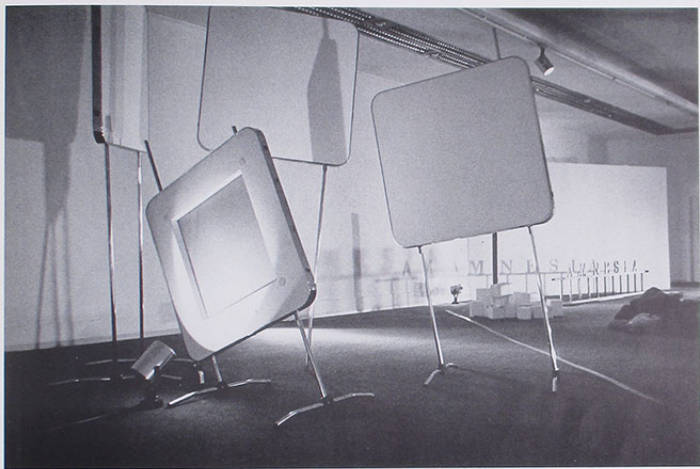








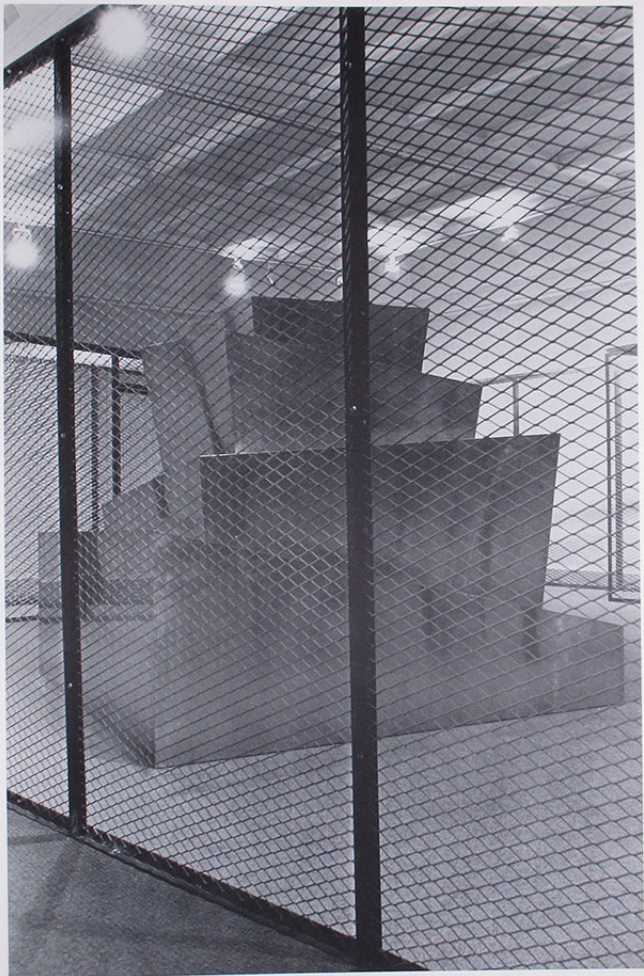




# AL McWILLIAMS

## *AXAXAXAS MLÖ*

1982, expanded steel fencing,  
2.49 - 2.18 x 7.31 x 8.53 m  
a copper ziggurat, 2.06 x 2.44 m square  
sound







"The Tower of Babel," Pieter Bruegel, D.G. van Beuningen Collection  
*Pieter Bruegel, Complete Edition of Paintings,*  
 by F. Grossman, London, Phaidon Press, 1973, plate 60.

**JBD** *Axaxaxas mlo* could only be produced by a culture where the doorway (threshold and transformation), where the ziggurat (transubstantiation and access to Heaven) are off kilter. The temple is off kilter.

**AMW** Or Tower of Babel.

**JBD** Do you see this work as representative of a culture which could only produce a Tower of Babel?

**AMW** That's a part of what this piece is, yes.

**JBD** It could only create discomfort in the viewer.

**AMW** Quite likely, yes. But discomfort is a component of all transformation.

**JBD** Between the encompassing sound of dogs, the diminishing angles, the doorway that narrows and the ziggurat that can't make it to Heaven. . .

**AMW** Well, they never do anyway, they never have, they probably never will.

**JBD** But at least they gave the comfort of the attempt. There are no Comfortable Words, as in the Book of Common Prayer, there are no Comfortable Words in this temple.

**AMW** Well, I don't quite see it as a temple. I see it as a site — as an energy station — something built in order to function.<sup>1</sup>

1. Interview between Jo-Anne Birnie Danzker and Al McWilliams, March, 1982.

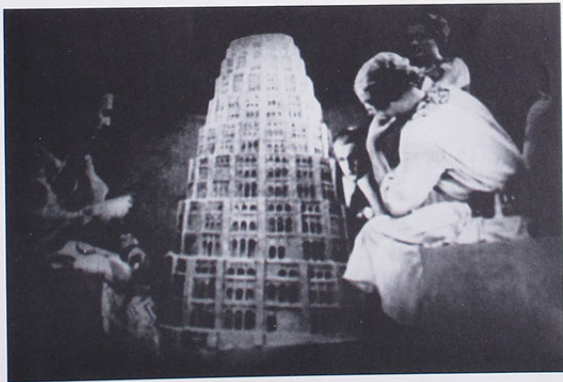


The title of the installation prepared by Al McWilliams for this exhibition, *Axaxaxas mlö*, is taken from Jorge Luis Borges' "The Library of Babel".<sup>2</sup> Despite this direct reference, and the above statement, the work should not be seen as a metaphor for the Tower of Babel. Neither are its preoccupations with Babel (scene of confusion, confusion of tongues, noisy assembly and meaningless noise)<sup>3</sup>. It does, however, approximate the dictionary definition of The Tower of Babel — a visionary plan.<sup>4</sup>

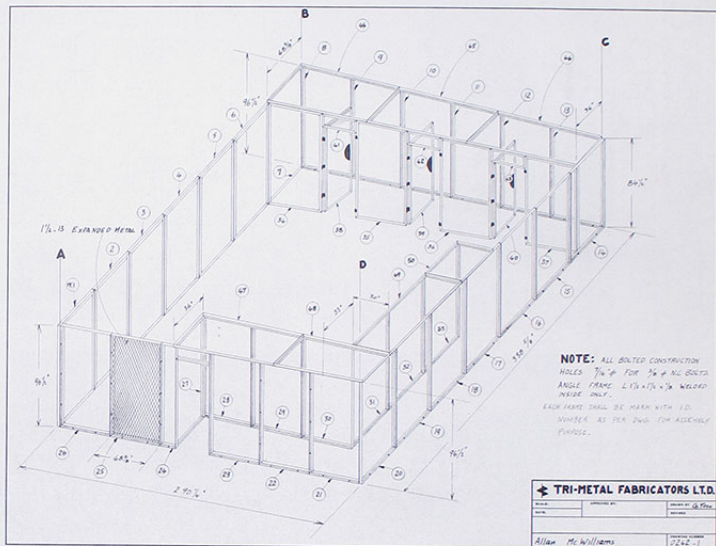
2. Jorge Luis Borges, *Labyrinths*, (New York: New Directions Publishing Corporation, 1964) p. 57.

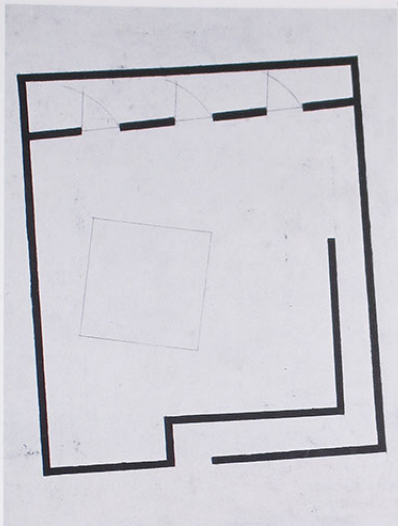
3. The Concise Oxford Dictionary, Oxford at the Clarendon Press; 1964, 1976, p. 67.

4. *ibid.* p. 67.



Still from "Metropolis" by Fritz Lang  
Photograph: Al McWilliams





Before considering its (non) metaphorical base, its resonances and its tongues, we should mark its physical plan:

the sound of barking dogs, taped at The Mortuary Temple of Ramesses II, Gournah, Egypt, 1970

construction, expanded steel fencing; 24 feet wide, 28 feet long, placed on a slight diagonal in South Gallery

entrance, 32 inches wide

covered passageway, 36 inches wide tapering to 33 inches over a 12 foot distance, turning at right angles and tapering to 30 inches over an additional 12 feet.

enclosed irregular space, open above, with one corner a foot lower than the others  
a copper ziggurat

three doors opening from the enclosed space into a corridor where height and width diminish.

The enclosure is expanded metal, a transparent grid, pattern and form.<sup>5</sup> Although it has considerable physical substance, visually it hides nothing, in fact it invites a kind of voyeurism, a desire to peer through and in that way it aids visual concentration. Its doorways and passages invite entry.

5. The text and description of *Axaxaxas mío* are based on notes by the artist, and interviews with the artist by the curator.

You pass through the piece, visually at first, then physically, then emotionally.

At the entrance of the passageway, the tapering of width and ceiling height are not immediately evident. However, as you move along its length, your body makes you aware that something is changing.

You are entering something like a maze. Do you remember where you've been? Are you seeking something?

You divest yourself of certain kinds of experience which belong outside the perimeter of the piece. The process becomes a purge, the beginnings of a transformation.

The sound of barking dogs from Egypt accompanies you, extending the spatial parameters of the piece. The sounds move, sometimes immediately behind you, sometimes faint and far away. Suddenly a momentary and mysterious voice, etched on the tape, a language without a name.

The passageway opens into a courtyard with a copper ziggurat — a conductor, a conduit, a mediator to the gods, elevating the human to the celestial. A transfer of energy, transubstantiation.

On the far side of the courtyard stand three doorways, transparent, opening into a corridor. Diminishing heights. Their function, a matter of choice, a decision, an opportunity to continue.

entrance = exit = entrance

Ambiguity between outside/inside

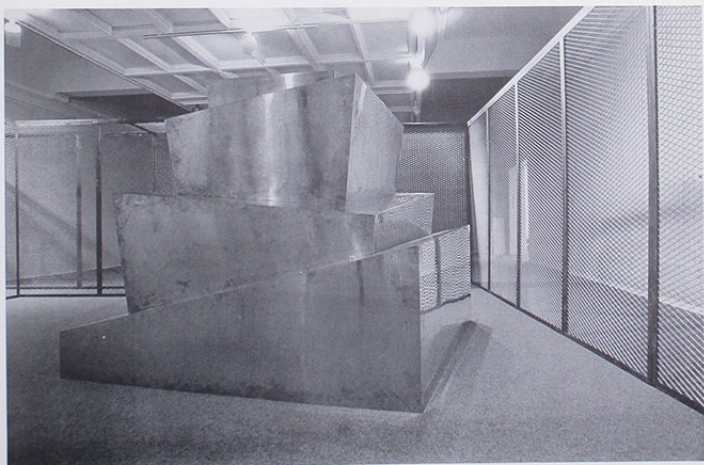
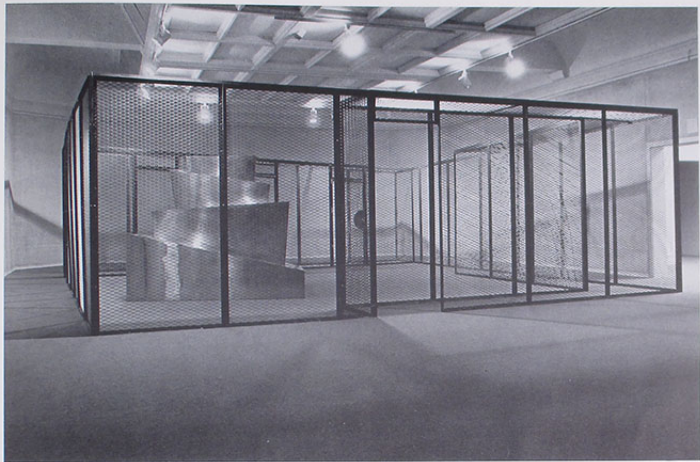
*in* enclosure *out* door to corridor

*in* corridor *out* door to enclosure

From enclosure to exit, through passageway. Expanding, it causes you to slow  
Outside

you must choose — to take leave of Axaxaxas mlö, or to circumbulate it, exploring it (and yourself) as an archeological site. [It is a site; it is not a metaphor for site.]





NOTES ON AXAXAXAS MLO

I see art (and this work) as a catalyst or an instrument/residue of thought.

I do not see it as a container for an activity (architecture) but more as an instrument of an activity.

Its presence is not in its specificity as an "art object", but in the state of mind it engenders, in its resonances.

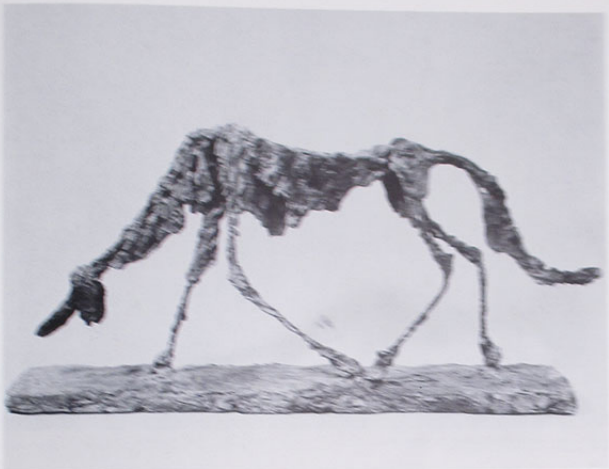
I have no interest in dealing with, or giving, a definitive explanation. I would rather provoke than delineate — provoke exploration. I expect the viewer to ask questions; questions about their culture, their belief systems, themselves.

They will not necessarily activate the piece as much as they activate themselves.

This work addresses issues that sometimes make us uncomfortable, that we don't really pay that much attention to — constriction, restriction, discomfort, habit. It really addresses habit. We relate to the world in terms of habit. This work attempts to break that up a little, asks us to reassess how we view things.



"Mortuary Temple of Ramesses II"  
Egypt. Architecture, Sculpture, Painting,  
by Kurt Lange and Max Himmeler with contributions by  
Eberhard Otto and Christiane Desroches-Noblecourt.  
London, Phaidon, 1966, plate 200.



Alberto Giacometti  
 1957 (1957)  
 Bronze (cast 1957), 1st 45.7 cm / high,  
 at base 35.4 cm (19 1/2 in.)  
 Collection: The Museum of Modern Art, New York,  
 A. Conger Goodyear Fund



"Mosch", the god of the dead, Carl Mosch.

NOTES ON AXAXAXAS MLO

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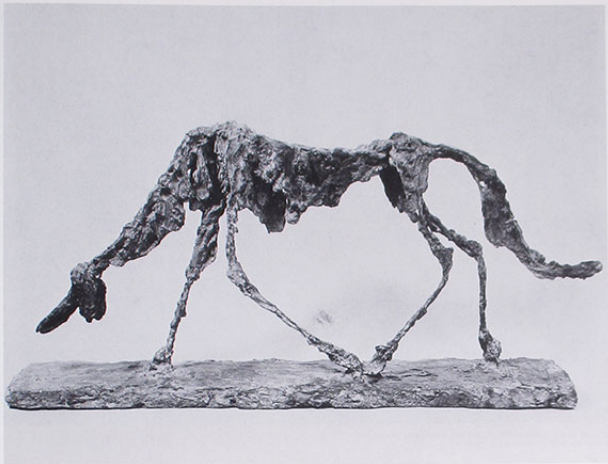
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"Mortuary Temple of Ramesses II"  
Egypt: Architecture, Sculpture, Painting,  
by Kurt Lange and Max Hirmer with contributions by  
Eberhard Otto and Christiane Desroches-Noblecourt.  
London, Phaidon, 1968, plate 241.

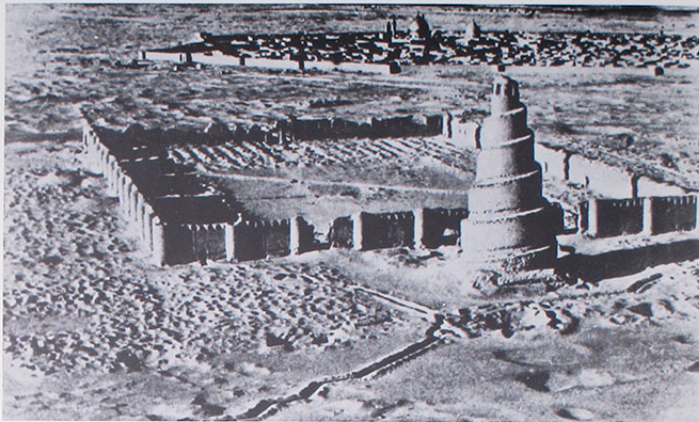


Alberto Giacometti  
Dog (1961)  
Bronze (cast 1967), 18" (45.7 cm) high,  
at base 39 x 6 1/4" (99 x 15.5 cm).  
Collection, The Museum of Modern Art, New York.  
A. Conger Goodyear Fund.



"Anubis", the god of the dead, Cairo Museum.





Samarra, Great Mosque of al-Mutawakkil, Iraq (aerial view)  
*Islamic architecture*, by John D. Hoag

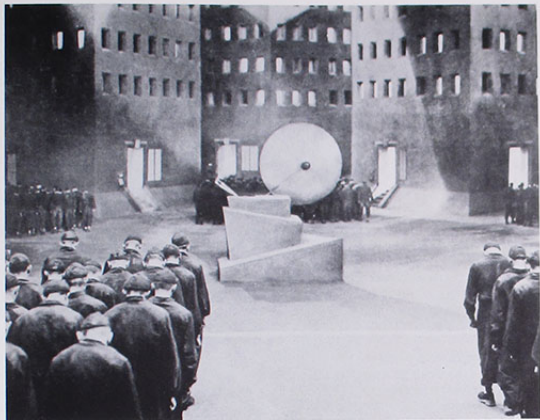
I don't think the experience of this piece is found in everyday life. It is an aggregation of many everyday experiences, which, in combination, become something else again.

The piece does not seek a specific response. It does offer a specific physical structure that is rich in association. Though it is necessary to go through particular physical actions, and those actions have a function (self-awareness, a new concentration), it is clear that one and the same reality may be split up into many diverse realities when it is beheld from different points of view — points of view that are determined not by physical locus but by mental locus and personal history. The options are the viewer's. What is their degree of participation?

The piece exists somewhere between "lived" reality and "observed" reality.

I am very apprehensive when the word "metaphor" is applied to my work. Metaphor seems a restraint, a desire to circumvent reality, an attempt to dispose of an object by having it masquerade as something else. I would like to think my work occupies a place "in the real world" and does not simply exist as a metaphor for that world. It may reflect, comment upon, investigate the "real" world, but it is both of that world and in that world.

Previously, metaphor was an ornament on reality. The tendency now is to extinguish the real and "realize" the metaphor — an inversion. It's time to invert the inversion.



Still from "Metropolis" by Fritz Lang



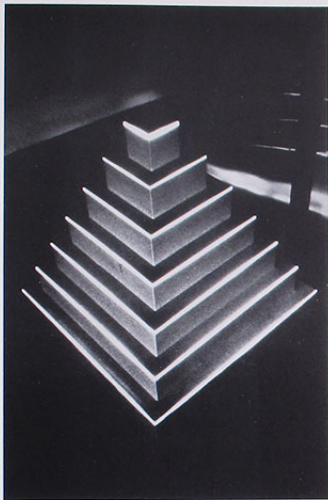
Tomb of the Askias built 1495 in Gao, Mali  
*The Prodigious Builders*, by Bernard Rudofsky  
 New York, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977, p. 158, plate 121.  
 photograph: Sigrid Spaeth

As an artist one has an obligation to at least direct if not control. This requires an awareness of the energies one tries to harness in a work. I have an obligation to my own initial excitement, that almost incomprehensible moment when a piece becomes possible. An obligation to the work (and working) itself. But if the work has any merit it should be able to take off on its own. It is not a sacrosanct and separate entity. The residue of art is one of its most important aspects. Its leavings may be a sense of colour, form, self, otherness — whatever.

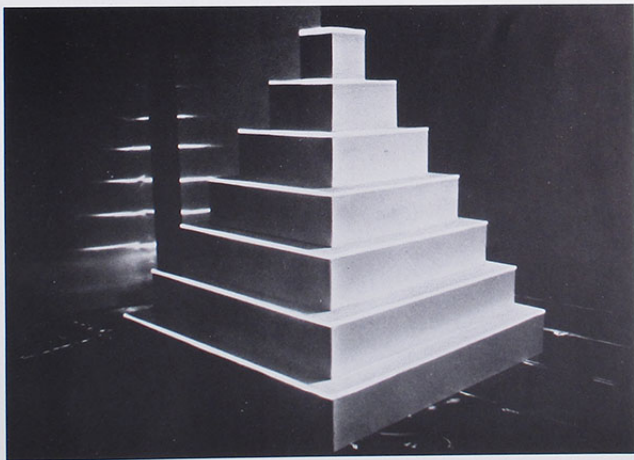
The first experience of Axaxaxas mlö is outside the enclosure, looking into it, picking up the associations of the open grid of the fence. Its association with a power station, the references to the ziggurat, the courtyard (cloister), to Islamic architecture, the minaret pre-dated by the ziggurat form, mortuary tombs, a step pyramid. And, of course, the ever present sound of the dogs.

There are certain resonances: the entrance passageway carries a function similar to that of a maze — it plays memory games, it aids forgetfulness.

The idea of polarities — the spare and unitary object (oneness) held in thrall by the complex, chaotic active piece (overallness).



Untitled, 1967 by Al McWilliams  
enamel, wood, plexiglas and electric light  
photograph: Al McWilliams



The doorway as a threshold element, a between, neither inside nor outside. Its sole physical component, space. A transitional area.

A series of spirals: the cyclical orchestration of the barking dogs (sound is spatial), the ziggurat, the angled entrance, circumambulation by the viewer — the persistence of form. As in Minoan Crete, the Spiral and the Labyrinth, one the reiteration of the other.

Copper as a conductor, a generative material, with references to electrical energy, power — the minaret as mediator and conduit.

Allusions to conversion — conversion with religious connotations, conversion in terms of energy.

**JBD** If someone has the courage to keep going in this piece, despite the barking dogs, the disorientation, the discomfort, they end up in the final corridor. If you explore all the margins of the piece — you end up in a more closed situation than if you came to the centre of the piece, centred yourself, observed the ziggurat and the spaces around you. It's almost as if by pushing too far, you can lose meaning, you find yourself in a dead end.

**AMW** No, you end up with yourself.

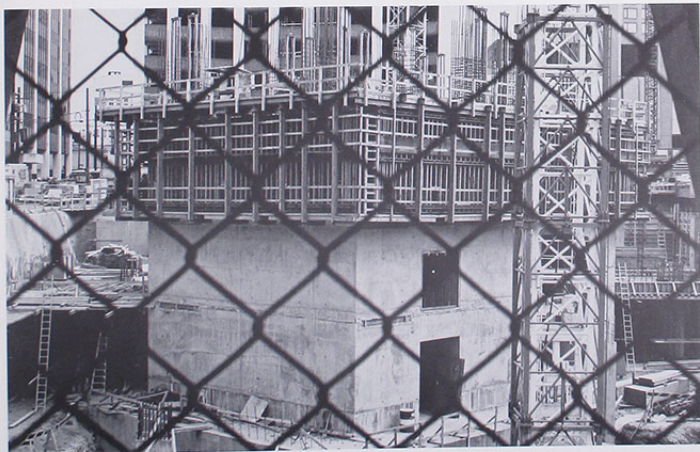


Power station, Vancouver  
photograph: Al McWilliams

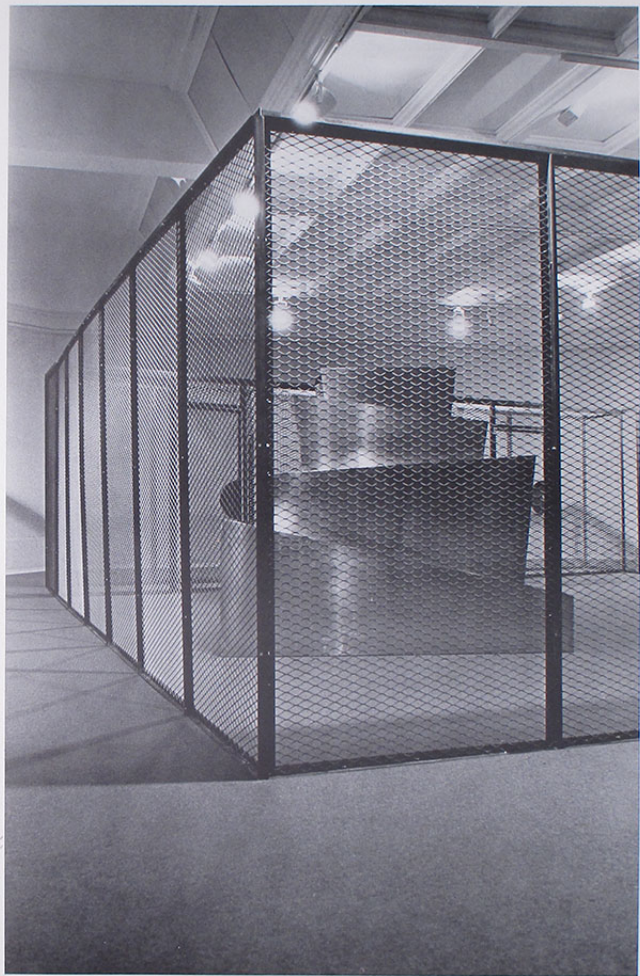




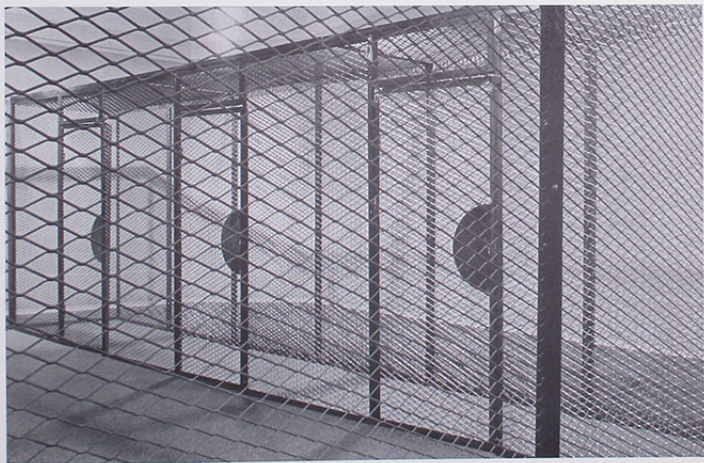
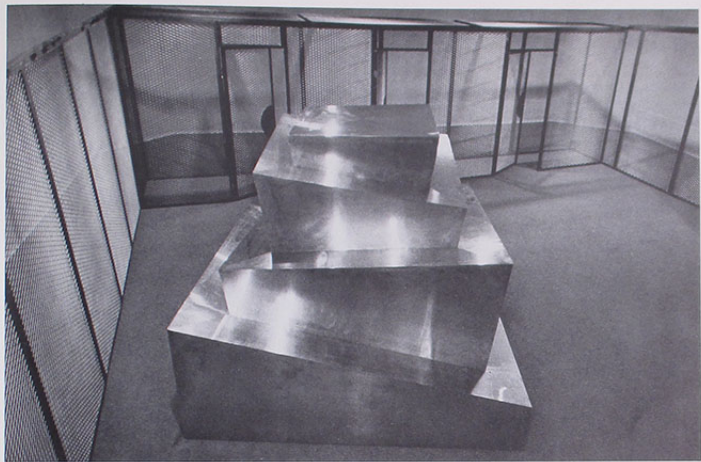
Samarra, the Malwiya (minaret) of the Great Mosque of al-Mutawakkil, Iraq Islamic architecture, by John D. Hoag, p. 54.



Construction site, Vancouver  
photograph: Al McWilliams



AXAXAXAS MLO



# LIZ MAGOR

## *EIGHTEEN BOOKS*

1982, sheet lead and Xeroxed pages

## *A RESEMBLANCE*

1982, lead, and wood









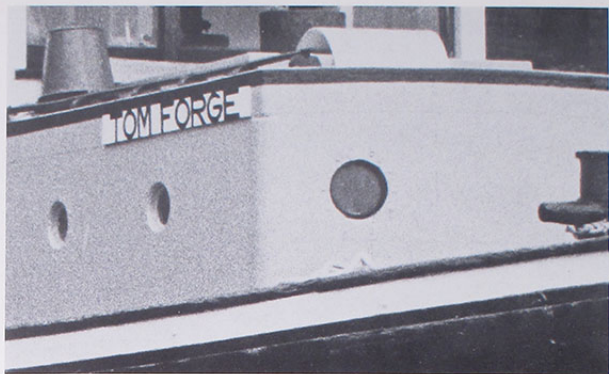
I go out and back every day, or several times a day if I'm pulling in logs.





It's difficult to get out of here. There's no way by land, you go by water to get in and to get out. It's such a lot of bother getting down to the water on the low tide that I wait for the highs. I do all my coming and going on the high tide.





I keep an eye on her. She's too old I think, to be way out here and on her own too. But she's been here a long time and she's determined to stick. So I take a look each time past. Checking to see there's no change, no sign of trouble.

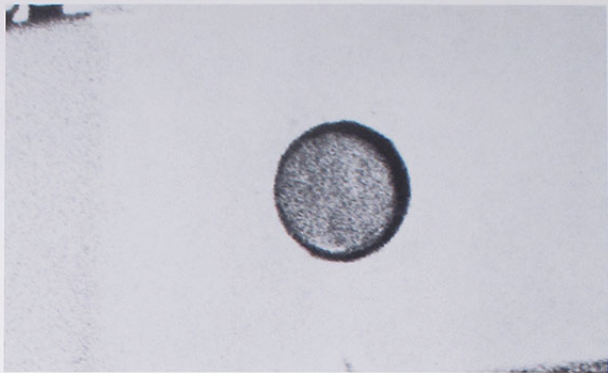




Sunday is a day for visitors. But I don't need much company, it's enough just to see the Tom Forge going back and forth. That's my idea of a neighbour.



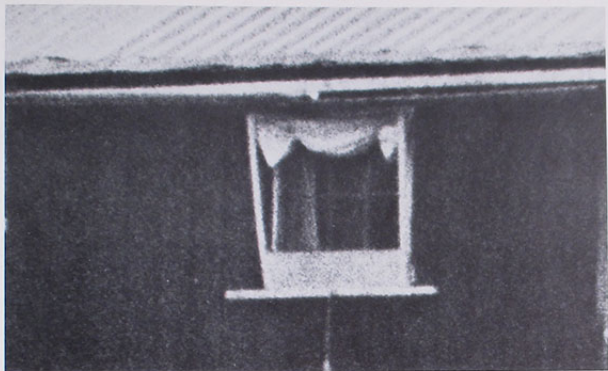




When she came back here after her eye operation I told her that if she ever needed help she should hang a dishcloth out her kitchen window, a white dishcloth.







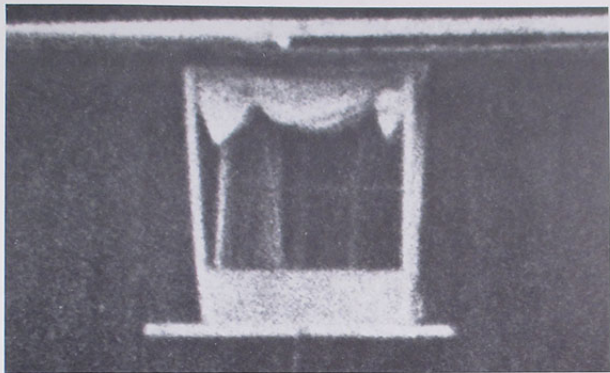
I was worried. I felt so weak. That's why I put the flag out, a signal to the Tom Forge. I put it out on the beach and then just had to go in and lie down.





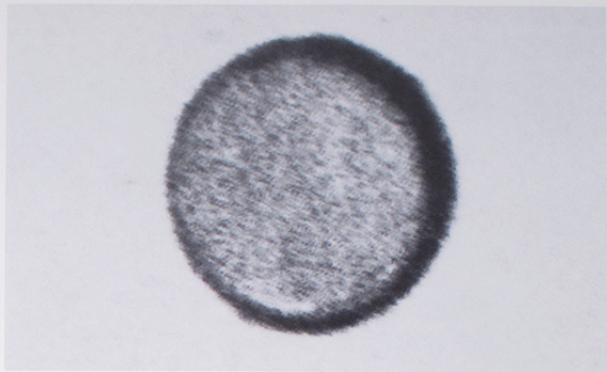
She was sick. She put out a distress flag, but she just put it on the beach, lying flat on the beach. That's okay for planes but not for boats, so I didn't see it for a few days. Besides, I was always looking for a dishcloth in the window, I looked for it every time I went past.





Every day I could hear the Tom Forge going back and forth, but nobody showed up. Looking at something else I guess, staring at the water I suppose.

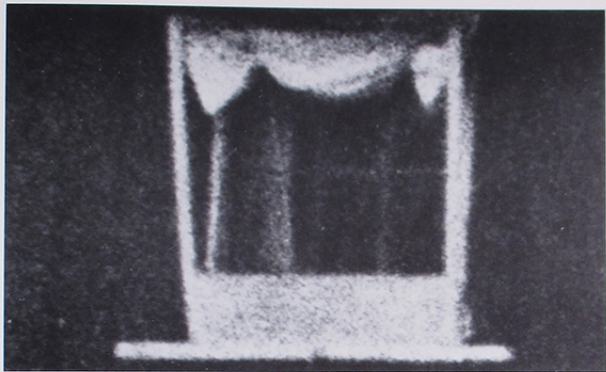




I went to shore. I saw the flag on the beach and knew right away what it meant. I went into the house and she was lying on the bed. She looked so small and thin.







I have always weighed 98 lbs. Once I weighed more, when I was first married I weighed 124 lbs. But that year we worked so hard taking those darn boats up and down that I lost some of that weight and went down to 98 lbs. And I stayed there, 60 years, until this trouble with my eyes. After my operation I was down to 82 lbs. But I thought to myself "this is no good" and I got myself back up to 98 lbs. again and that's where I am now.





It was always weighed  
93 lbs. Once I weighed  
more. When I was first  
married I was up to 124 lbs.

She was sick. She put  
out a distress flag but we  
didn't see it for a few days  
because she just put it  
out on the beach. Lying  
flat on the beach.

Two years ago, a woman told me the history of the weight of her body. Although she had lived a long time her body weight had changed only a few times and on the whole she maintained a weight of 98 lbs.

She identified with the body that weighed 98 lbs.

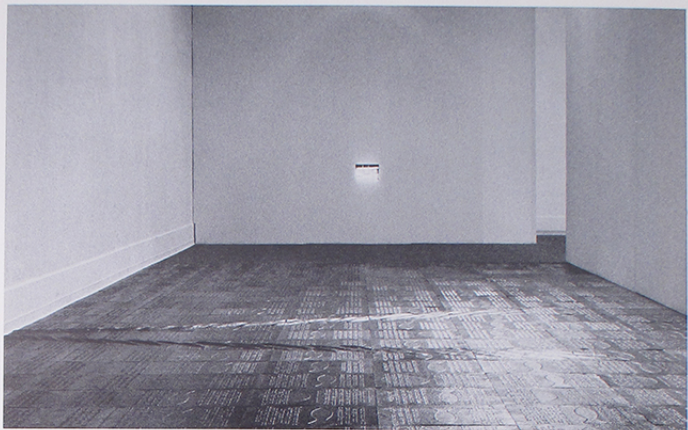
Of course, she was still herself when she weighed less or more, but not so completely herself. When she weighed 98 lbs. she more closely resembled the person that she thought of as herself.

A year later, an event occurred that again affected the weight of this woman. She became ill and lay in her small cabin, unnoticed, for several days. She put out a distress sign, but because it didn't resemble, in placement or in form, what had been agreed upon, it didn't communicate as intended to her neighbours, and it was only by chance that she was rescued.

This story has qualities in common with my own concerns.

I have wanted to objectify the history of a body and the process of change that affects that body. I have chosen a material way to communicate my understanding of a physical condition. The means I use may communicate by agreement or by chance, or may go unnoticed.

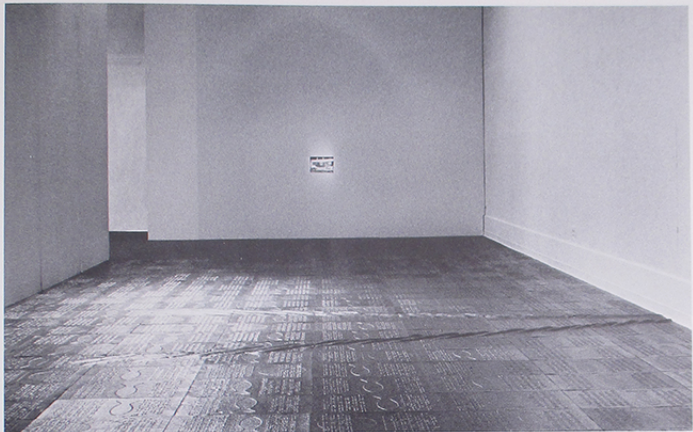
For me, these common qualities constitute a resemblance between my activity and this event. To find the extent of this resemblance I have represented elements of the story through images and material. These representations vary in degree but resemble each other in their attempt to communicate some aspects of a life and the events that affect that life.



THE BOAT WENT OUT EVERY MORNING

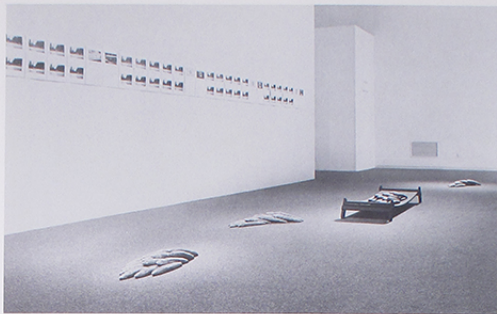






AND EVERY EVENING IT CAME IN AGAIN





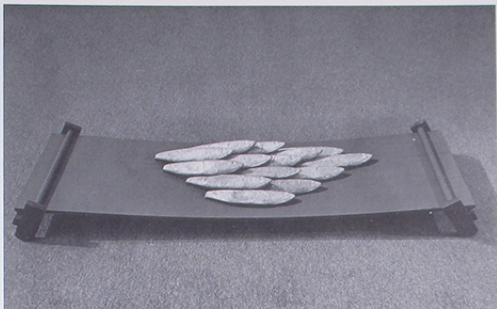
A Resemblance



98 lbs.



124 lbs.



82 lbs.



98 lbs.



# JERRY PETHICK

## *THE SEVENTH SCREEN/RETURNING YOU TO REGULAR PROGRAMMING*

1980-81, glass, enamelled steel  
etched mirror, silicone seal  
diffraction grating, paint  
1.47 m x 2.69 m

## *THE LIGHTHOUSE INVITES THE STORM/CHARTING UNDULATION*

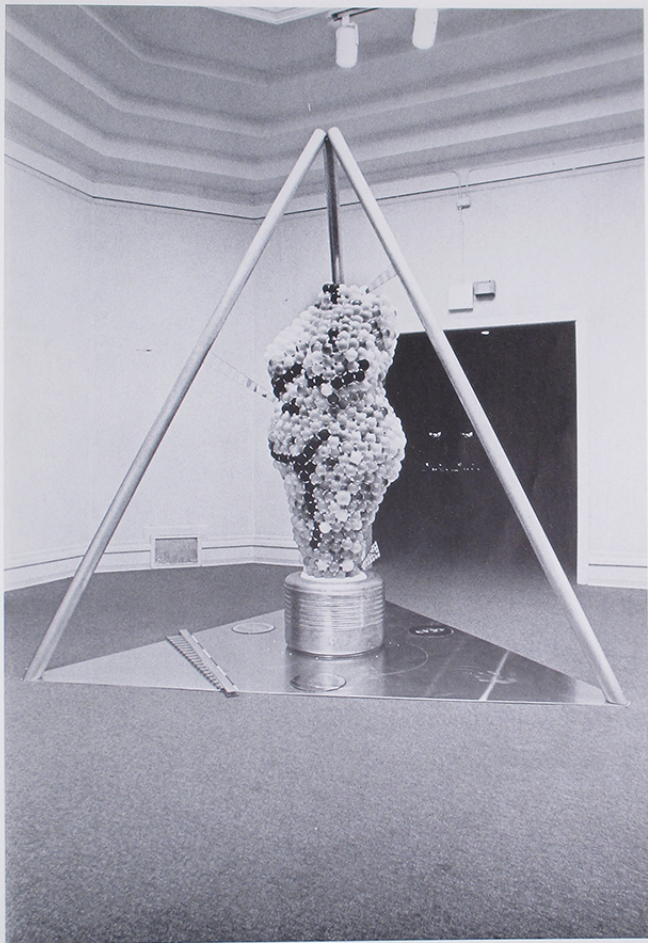
1981-82, aluminum, mirror, silicone seal, light  
buoy lens, diffraction grating, wood, enamelled  
steel, signal light  
1.45 m x 1.07 m (dia.)

## *THE REPLICA OF WILLENDORF/POST PREHISTORIC*

1981-82, light bulbs, silicone seal  
aluminum, glass, etched mirror  
2.85 m x 2.75 m x 2.34 m

## *SUNDOGS/ACTUAL AND VIRTUAL*

1982, glass, silicone seal, plaster  
gold leaf, enamel on copper, paint  
1.45 m x 1.12 m x .64 m



THE REPLICA OF WILLENDORF/POST PREHISTORIC



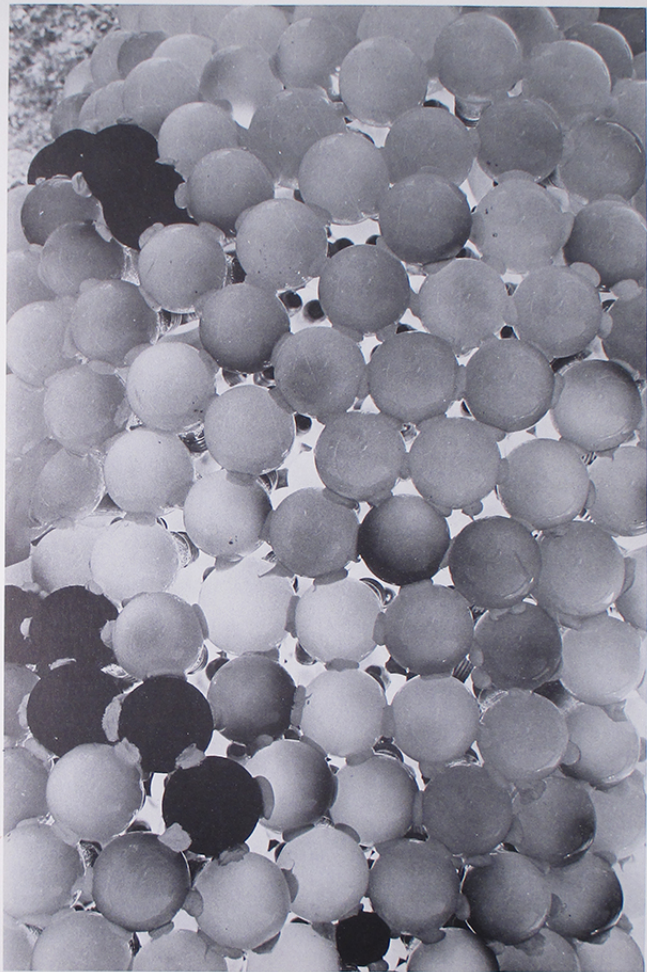


Photo: Scott Watson

## STRATAGEMS OF DISTORTION: AN INTERVIEW WITH JERRY PETHICK

The works by Jerry Pethick in *Mise en scène* are from his *Stratagems of Distortion/ Sensations of Illusion* project which consists of 12 works. Parts of the project were shown at and/or in Seattle<sup>1</sup> and Malaspina College in Nanaimo.<sup>2</sup> These four works are the most recent in the project and have not been shown before.

In August of 1981 I taped an interview with Jerry Pethick at his home on Hornby Island. A transcript was made. The tape was not exactly clear and many lacunae were indicated in the text. Independently, Jerry and I filled these in. Jerry pointed out how interesting the differences were. A process of distortion had begun. From the actual conversation, to tape, to transcript, to annotation. Why not continue this process which mirrored the work? I constructed an interview from my transcript — going considerably beyond what editing normally is. I quote Jerry extensively — but the shape of the conversation is recast. Paragraphs and sentences are “made up”. In this manner I tried to convey what my understanding of Pethick’s thought as I understood it. Jerry has also reconstructed (or deconstructed) the transcript. As a real event produced these fictional dialogues we return the writing to conversation, where it originated, and present two versions of a single conversation side by side in order to create another.

Scott Watson

1. and/or, Seattle, “Jerry Pethick: The Polarity Stratagem/Evolved Distortion”, March 12 - 28, 1981.
2. Malaspina College, Nanaimo, 1981.

## A TALK WITH SCOTT WATSON AND STEREO INTERVIEW

In August of 1981, Scott came to Hornby. I talked and talked and I remember, for the most part, Scott listening, except for a few very precise questions. We altered the tape and transcript and the following is some aspect of that conversation. The sound of the eagles has been stricken from the record and replaced by dogs. Our communications merge as one to save the printed word. Humour has been ruthlessly hunted down and anaesthetised, except where it remains hidden and disguised. The names have been altered to protect the living. The transformations have evolved new information and vision. The exchange occurs, the dimension grows.

Jerry Pethick

**SW** Has anyone ever told you that you remind them of William Blake?

**JP** There is a kind of split which haunts all my concerns.

**SW** A split?

**JP** Yes. This and that, for example.

**SW** Why do you call it a split. What’s wrong with rupture, breach of tear?

**JP** Well the *image* I have is of a perfect sphere, of, say *marble* and it is struck in such a way that it falls in two halves. It’s a clean break. We’ve been bamboozled into reading ourselves and the world, speaking of splits, by means of this split or schiz. We learn to make choices between, we don’t perceive among. Instead of the real we deal with models of the real. The way we deal with things, especially with art is in terms of an inside/outside dichotomy. Language itself has come to rest on a bipolar metaphor so that it is almost impossible to locate my concern in language.

**SW** Let’s begin by discussing the project, *Stratagems of Distortion*, as a whole.

**JP** The show is about *viewpoint*, it’s about *polarity* (opposing extremes of linear concepts in a spatial manner), it also questions the premise that duality models are as models of reality. There is a strong cross-over with the fourteenth century (pre-spherical world, pre-printing) illustrated specifically in terms of those periods (carpet, screen, relief, three panels as references). I am also attempting to evoke direct and simple pre-historic hand-made images while weaving manufactured items within those images. The work is an attempt to transform the tangibility or physical aspects of material (mass, density, eternity) entirely.

The presence of structure is asserted by wisps of dynamics. Density becomes



I would like my work to deal with the history of "model-making" in such a way that the integrity of the model is broken down. I use light and icons. The icons are distortions, of course, but the materials I use imply other systems of structure beneath the ordinary ones we deploy in order to perceive. And I use light in my work. This not only dematerializes the object, but calls attention to visibility itself as an event which can dislocate our normal way of seeing and naming.

**SW** Do you distrust perception?

**JP** Not exactly. It's just that we all see quite differently. But this difference is modified by our beliefs about reality. In our culture things seem to boil down to a deeply dualistic way of describing reality. Mind/body; true/false; those kinds of models. I am inside them myself but questioning from inside them is my attempt to deconstruct them. And I hope that this deconstruction allows something of the marvellous or new into the work which is, in one sense, what it is all about.

**SW** I see you very much at the forefront of post modern thought which from Nietzsche onward is an attempt to deconstruct Western metaphysics. Again, it is the duality which bothered Nietzsche. For me, the most fascinating thing about deconstruction is not the nihilism but the appearance of new arrangements in twentieth century thought — like the body.

**JP** Of course, we are coming through science, poetry, art and philosophy to see the body as what we are rather than the old idea of being some spook inhabiting "a mortal coil". And this affects my work. The way we deal with things, especially art, is an inside/outside dichotomy. What we make or produce "comes out". And once it "gets out" it is perceived by other people's eyes as a structure or an aesthetic that doesn't have anything to do with the functional aspect of what made it. I like to play with the idea of crossing over that membrane. By membrane I mean something more than skin — the perceptual skin, I guess, with all the nerve endings, eyes, nose, ears etc. which extend the body outward, beyond the visible physical thing.

**SW** You mean whatever Olson meant by *proprioception*?

**JP** Yes. Olson's take on history is very interesting to me too. The large vision combined with the personal concern. He wanted our historical imagination to centre on place and cosmology — where I think it ought to be also. That's why the attack on Western civilization, not the achievements, just the myopic view that that's it for history. What does pre-history mean, for example?

**SW** Before written records.

**JP** Well, we've got to do something about the imperialization of writing has over the way we figure out the world. Navigation interests me, for among other reasons, it is, or was, the

essence. These exist only in the intimacy of the making. I feel that the prime tool for these explorations is the presence of ambient light. The tonality of the transparent quality of glass, for the present, fascinates me.

**SW** What does *The Imposter Puppet*, which I gather was the impetus for the series, have to do with your notion of the split?

**JP** My vision of the split is a clean surgery, accomplished without a knife or an anaesthetic. It has to do with the presentation of models of choice. We refine personally and give to our children. We maintain all our faculties but search for the threads we feel are connecting them. I see a ten inch diameter smooth sphere of blue-white marble being lightly struck by a tuning fork and the cleavage occurring soundlessly, cleanly, but leaving a rough interior surface. The two halves slowly decrease their roll like a spinning coin. By saying that, I have constructed a model of what I feel the word "split" means to me. But I have become more convinced that there is no such thing. *The Imposter Puppet* was a question of who is in control, not so much a split but manipulation.

**SW** How do you feel you have been able to unify separate works as a part of a single project?

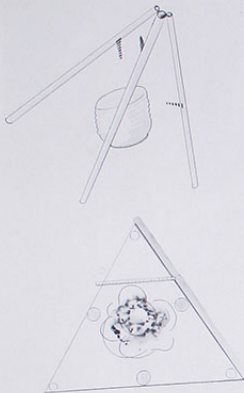
**JP** The unity is there, regardless of the density. Some thoughts feel right because you have arrived at the most suitable — like multiple choice. Thoughts slapping together in various orders until they assume a personal significance. Language, particularly the written word, has become the primary model for our transposing of reality. Written language changes a primary form, that of communication, into an encoded matrix for communication. The concept of de-materialisation interests me, because it is primarily a perception of matter, even in language.

**SW** Twentieth century sculptors have approached the use of material in such a varied way, that matter, as part of creative expression, has been totally altered from the classical use of material.

**JP** Yes. Physics totally altered our concept of the universe at the start of this century. Flight de-materialised space. Radio and telephone de-materialised space and distance. Manifestations of thought must be a transformation that barely pertains to matter.

I'm fascinated with flies in the summer. They seem to fly always to the centre of a still hot room, changing direction errati-

*Replica/Demon Stopper*  
1962, ink, pencil on paper, 88.5 x 58.2 cm



*Venus of Willendorf*  
25,000 - 20,000 B.C., stone, 11.1 cm. high  
Museum of Natural History, Vienna

*Venus of Willendorf 25,000 - 20,000 B.C.  
and replica, Museum of Natural History, Vienna*  
Photograph by Hank Bull

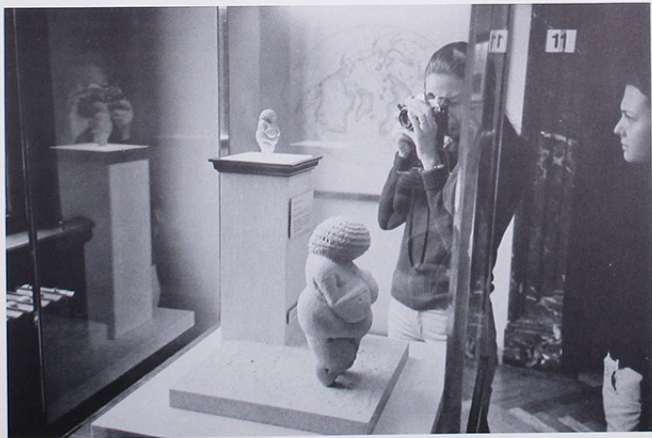




Photo: Scott Watson

repository of much oral tradition. The four works in *Mise en scène* are from your *Stratagems of Distortion* project. Perhaps we could talk about the pieces in the exhibition in the context of that project.

**JP** Well, the project concerns my attempts to deconstruct models and to imagine history as a sculptor — which was my original training before I turned to holography. (I was led to holography by my interest in the violence of light.) In a formal sense my concern in these pieces is with establishing a personal alphabet of form. The cross-currents between two-dimensional information and three-dimensional information fascinate me. It was in the fifteenth century — a great epoch in the history of navigation that our imagination of the world became three-dimensional and not flat — two-dimensional. The fifteenth century culture functioned as a duality — church and state — which brought forward my concerns about duality.

**SW** The fifteenth century is also an image of cross-currents, cultural clashes, an internal divide in Western culture — the emergence of “modern” man, humanist thought etc.

**JP** And the invention of the printing press. My work refers to information. The black dots, the modular aspect of the works has to do with a reference to print as interruption. The work is black and white to refer to the printed page and also offers a basic image of duality. Of course, by using the dots, I’m trying to restore a sense of being among — a relaxation about fragmentation — which is where I think we must begin.

**SW** Could you discuss the replica of the Venus of Willendorf?

**JP** I think that the Venus of Willendorf is our first piece of sculpture. It is our first evidence of an idea of using form to express an idea. I think it is dated at 20,000 B.C. It shows evidence of highly sophisticated thought as does a later venus found at France.

**SW** The Perigordian Venus looks like a Brancusi.

**JP** Well that’s no accident. And this is what I mean by cross-connecting. Such connections are the activity of culture itself. You might say that Matisse, Brancusi and Picasso invented modern, twentieth century art by rescuing the paleolithic. For it was such works, Picasso’s Iberian heads and African masks, for example, which gave them the new. That period is a revival, just like neo-classicism, except of pre-historical ideas rather than Greek and Roman ones.

**SW** Why is your replica made out of light bulbs.

**JP** There are several considerations. The symbol, like a hieroglyph of an idea in comic books — an image of illumination. The notion of model-making itself; I wanted to find a way of molecular stacking which would look different

cally, (about twelve or fifteen flies) and then they hover momentarily before moving to another formation as if by some hidden signal. The velocity and freedom to describe these constructs leave me breathless. I have wondered whether the movement, pauses and the erratic space traced by the flies relates directly in some purely mechanical visual way with their eyesight. Whether the scanning, ninety percent of the time (saccades) and the fixation periods of only ten percent, have any correlation with the flies’ movement and static periods. (A spatial *ziggurat* continuously described.)

**SW** Can you be more specific about de-materialising in the art historical context? Boccioni seems to have been someone who explored material structure. You sometimes move into a science-oriented aspect that is not easily recognised as connected to the formal concerns of modern sculpture.

**JP** A propeller when rotating de-materialises. At the 1909 air show which Brancusi, Duchamp and Leger attended together, Duchamp reputedly asked Brancusi if he could make anything as beautiful as a propeller. The propeller itself, the concept — even the name, must have evoked a new sense of proportion, of beauty and of utility. The structural uniqueness of aeroplanes, tension and lightness, the peculiar configuration necessary for flight must have impressed them and their work rings with reflections of this occasion. But to have been present when an engine and propeller were “fired-up” (relates to steam terminology) and to watch the propeller de-materialise into a translucent disc, must have been astonishing.

There is a wonderful photograph of Duchamp half de-materialising behind one of his optical discs, and the transparency of his big glass, makes you realise the impact of that show on these artists, and on Duchamp especially. A re-defining of the real.

**SW** Did you know that when Wittgenstein was studying mathematics and engineering at the University of Manchester, he worked on an early project in 1908 on a new design for a propeller?

**JP** It could have been the same one that Duchamp spoke of a year later and the one that led Wittgenstein eventually to question the terms and qualities of reality in the theoretical world. (Was Wittgenstein an Eskimo?)

The idea of de-materialisation occurred in my earlier work, but when I viewed my first hologram and realised that an illusory but





THE LIGHTHOUSE INVITES THE STORM/CHARTING UNDULATION



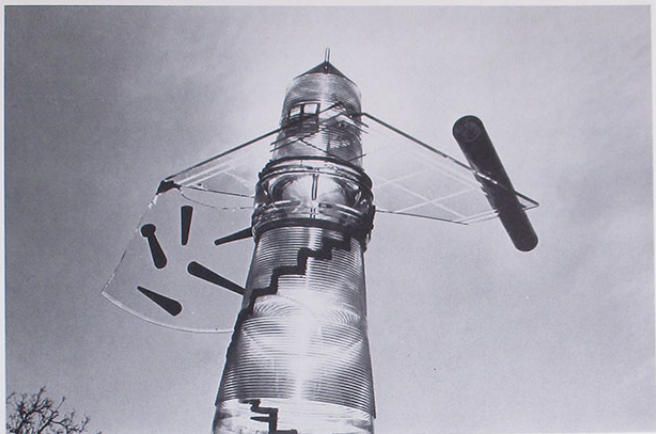
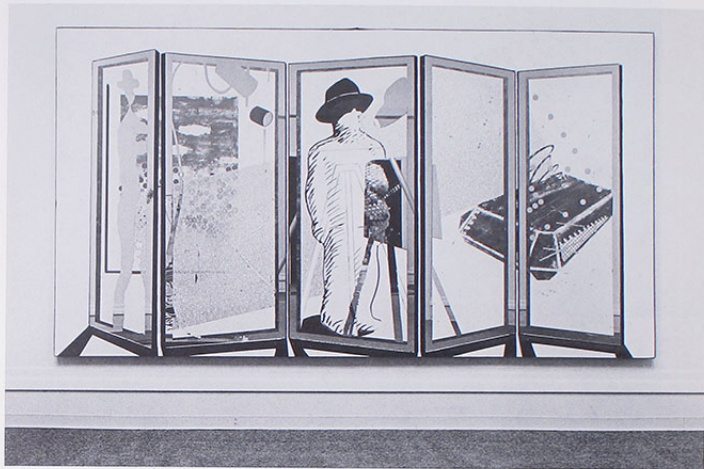


Photo: Scott Watson





*THE SEVENTH SCREEN / RETURNING YOU  
TO REGULAR PROGRAMMING*

from a scientific model — which I claim is as arbitrary as my model. Equally important was my concern, not only with light but with eyesight. From a distance the effect is of a granular photograph — the thing comes together at sixty yards.

**SW** And the tripod?

**JP** ...is a replicating or pointing machine used to replicate sculpture. Rodin used one, you can change scale with it and the principle involved is based on a translation of two-dimensional information into three-dimensional information — my favourite stratagem of distortion.

**SW** And so the Venus connects to the model of the lighthouse which is called *The Lighthouse Invites the Storm*. Could you explain the title?

**JP** It is from a Malcolm Lowry poem. As Lowry was well-read in the Kabala I suppose he intended a certain meaning. However, for my purposes, the title refers again to duality and reversal. The lighthouse is part of the navigation/map-making process. All the lighthouses in the world constitute a map, or model of danger. This is one of man's most interesting achievements, one that took thousands of years. As navigation is about routes of trade and communication — the very field of cultural interchange — it struck me as a fertile image — an image of communication and interchange as a dangerous activity. The lighthouse, like the Venus is a dense image. It has religious connotations, it is the actual site of the development of important light technology. Fresnel invented the Fresnel Lens to illuminate lighthouse lights so they would shine further. I use Fresnel Lens throughout my work. The title, to go back to your question, really refers to a "reality shift". The shift in our imagination of the world from a flat slab to a globe etc.

**SW** Another piece involved two dogs.

**JP** They are Sun Dogs. Do you know what Sun Dogs are?

**SW** No.

**JP** Again a nautical image. Sometimes there is a "fake" sun. It's an ocean phenomenon and figures large in sailor superstition (a form of knowledge outside/knowledge that interests me...)

**SW** You, Coleridge, Melville and Olson.

**JP** ...You see two suns, each identical. We would say that one is real, the other fake. I've seen it once on the prairies where you could not distinguish. The Dogs are therefore a symbol of light, a symbol of death, and a symbol of "the split". There is something odd about the question — which is real and which is fake. You perceive both equally. So the whole reliance on perception to determine reality is called into question in this image. One of the Dogs has real gold-leaf — the other fake gold-leaf. They are in little boxes like manufactured Buddhas. These gilded Buddhas are not Buddhas until they are consecrated. Before that moment

real non-physical world existed there, it altered the direction of my work immediately. The solidity of space itself became apparent to me. Even the dimension of space could be constructed. Then I re-discovered that, for me, light is the vehicle of control within visual re-construction.

**SW** At one point you mentioned your sculpture in terms of "machines" or "devices". Do you feel a polarisation between you and your work and does that difference reflect a dichotomy or a classification of animate or inanimate objects?

**JP** The "machines" of the works, or of myself, were once separated by a definite although flexible membrane. The membrane of two sides becomes merely an extension of sensation where intuition operates freely. Depth perception in eyesight is a good example of a dual system that makes a dimensional shift. Two separate and different views of the same image (a simple addition) generates the whole third dimension. Spatial reconstruction is a shared unity.

**SW** One day I'll have to read Hegel. The idea of disunity, that hearing and sight are in conflict, or that smell and touch can no longer agree, or that all molecules are fighting with each other, seems vanquished by another view; changes of state, or shifts in dimension, indicating a hope for exchange. These changes of state must relate to the two-dimensional and three-dimensional alternate modes of expression in your work. What of the space between? And the qualities of difference?

**JP** Perceptual visualisation of real things and one's concepts of reality are existing in an unstated universe (cosmos). Perhaps the model making that presently exists in such profusion is still a reaction to both space and the physical world (that modern physics re-evaluated). The response is to fill this still uncomfortable void with systems, language, models, images, reproductions of things by the millions — all this to inhabit a quiet spatial, but non-static and perhaps, because there are no fixed coordinates, frightening space. To perceive the moon and earth as separated and independent bodies, the perception of the distance, difference — symbiotic existence is there. This is often known, but not implied, in the consideration. The implied is the universe that is lived in. The reality that, with its infinite complexities and nuances, has no name. The dimensionless space that exists among

they are just waiting to become Buddhas, although nothing in perception will tell you that they differ from real Buddhas. The Dogs, also, like Welsh miners' dogs, protect one in a dangerous job, which my job as an artist in our society is.

SW And death?

JP Well, an Anubis, Egyptian dog-headed god who guarded the realm of the dead.

SW I hope it amuses you that in AI's piece, which is next to yours there will be a tape of Egyptian dogs barking at the full moon over Luxor.

JP It amuses me very much.

SW Me too. A fortuitous coincidence perhaps?

JP That's a rather impoverished way of dealing with it. However, you asked me about death. Again life/death, the split, the duality. Our culture handles death through the imagery of capitalism. You can change what death means by packaging production. (You can change the meaning of gilt Buddhas). We don't think about death enough. If we did we might live more intensely.

SW Finally, there is a fourth piece, a panel, *The Seventh Screen/Returning you to Regular Programming*.

JP I call it flat sculpture. The basic images are a Japanese folding screen (which is punned in the title to indicate a technological screen — the ultimate reference being to "membrane"). The figure in the centre is a detective/artist; artist as investigator. A detective assembles fragments, or "clues", art is like that. The figure is bathed in theatre lights...

SW Inside a *mise en scène*.

JP Yes and no. He is lit, as the panel will be — it's an image of the situation of the panel first and then other things as well. The refractive material contains an image from a blueprint I did last year, *Prendre un cliché*, which is after Durer's demonstration of a perspective drawing of a lute. This would relate to my concern about the transformation of information from three dimensions into two.

SW Your work is very much activated by the references and cross-references. The more you know about these the broader the discussion becomes. However, I would imagine, given contemporary attitudes about art, you are criticized for — what — obscurity?

JP Well, let me just say that I hope people like my work. It interests me. The whole idea of communicating better is, on the one hand, a Fascist ideal...

SW It has always sent shivers down my spine.

JP ...on the other hand, as an artist, as a craftsman, you are trying to accomplish an efficient communication. My method is really like Pound's or Olson's, or Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*. The projects these men engaged in produced dense "obscure" works, a fact for which these great triumphs of the art of our time

the frontier worlds of our identification.

There is a difference between knowing and knowledge. *Imagination has no barriers; the space of the desert, of the sea, of the sky, all are within the confines of our skull.* To transpose these entities into a more viewable medium, from thought to manifestation, and to keep them as alive as the impulse and as tenuous as spatial reality, this process is the unstated evolution.

SW I would like to return to the pieces that will be in the *Mise en scène* show. Could we start with the lighthouse?

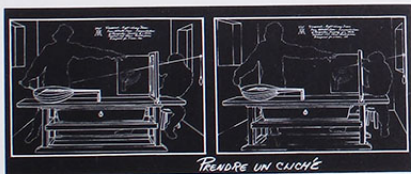
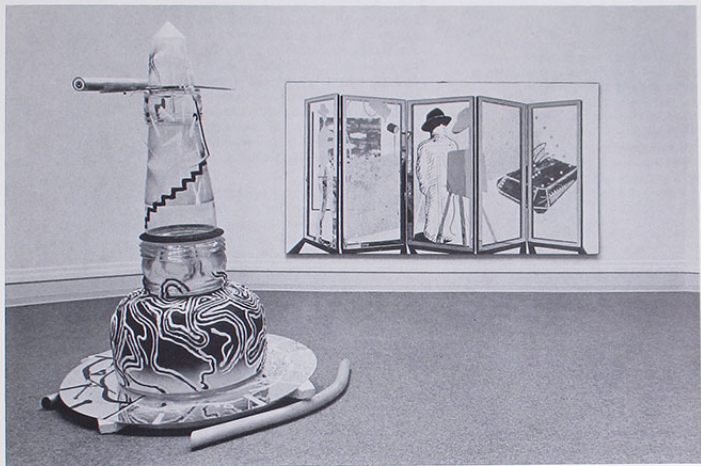
JP I've decided (after a poem by Malcolm Lowry) to call it *The Lighthouse Invites the Storm*. The lighthouse is a sense of then and now. The continuity of the network of lighthouses mark most dangers throughout the maritime world. You're dealing with nature. You've got this uncontrollable power which is very alive, which made early communication so excitingly hazardous.

People came back from India, not only had they never heard of India, but just the idea of getting there safely was one thing, getting back must have been a totally miraculous space travel. It has to do with all that comprehension of the world as a globe, as well. When Columbus came back and said; "I'm right, the world is round".

SW The fact that it was round must have been a great relief to the voyagers, at least the edge was gone, even if the power and unpredictability of the sea was not. What is the relationship of the final panel to the work as a whole?

JP The last panel of the three reference panels is called *The Seventh Screen/Returning you to Regular Programming*. In all the panels I used some traditional symbol in an accepted format, for the additional visual reference to the past as well as the present. The etched mirror that makes up the segments of the screen is an attempt to include some of the spatial awareness that occurs in Japanese screens. I remember seeing one that showed a soldier on horseback riding across a bridge, another segment of the same screen showed the view from beneath the bridge. Another screen, which influenced *The Crossfire Carpet*, was an aerial view looking down through the clouds into a courtyard, giving the idea of a cloud veil. One of the enamelled panels represents a carpet, one a relief, and this one represents a screen. I have used Durer's optical table woodcut, that was included in his book on perspective, and made it into a stereo pair using a diffracting material that reminds one of a movie screen (the silver





Prendre un cliché  
1981, blueprint, 68 x 163 cm



are often dismissed by philistines. However, if you enter the works of Pound, Olson or Joyce, you will find a world, history and the stance of a human being in his era. You don't read Olson, you study him. My work is about my excitements, once the viewer cottons on to those there should be no stopping him or her from dealing with the work. Once you start getting into something then you usually find that things relate. You open a magazine and something relates...

**SW** Learn a new word and all of a sudden it's everywhere.

**JP** ...It all relates, but somehow you want to choose significance in a better way than that. I get stronger and stronger feelings that that is the way the world is built up. It really is kind of Eastern cosmology. I mean they are right. It isn't all these dichotomies and shit; everything has absolutely everything to do with everything but you get lost in all the details if you don't try and keep it in a personal, significant way. It will get lost unless you keep a personal viewpoint. I don't think that it has to do much with consciousness. You are interested in certain things and then why bother with anything else, that's what it comes down to. If my work is judged the very aesthetic criteria which my work criticises, it would be too bad. There are people who lock into a way of seeing art and never see anything after a while except the way they see. If you have a system of aesthetics on one side of the eyes and the function on the other side of the eyes this tends to cloud how your sensibilities see things. What happens is that if it gets too smart, you don't see them anymore. The processing takes over.

Scott Watson

screen and that technology). The transparent nature of the screen suggests a clarity, but obviously distorts, because of the size and shapes of the figures, the artist and the elongated shadow, paradoxically, suggest extreme distortion. The shadow of the artist's figure with the hat stands in direct light, I imagine a harsh hot sun, or the artificial light on the spot, which also casts some of the shadows. I try to maintain both systems of illumination simultaneously, to create an added dimension within the screen and beyond.

It operates on many levels of image media devices, like T.V. studio windows, monitors and lights. This piece is probably the most personal statement in the group of work, because of when it was done. It was one of the works that led out the otherside to the timeless and more spacious Dogs and Replica.

**SW** Could you discuss the replica of the Venus of Willendorf?

**JP** I found after some time on constructing the Venus, that I was constantly distracted with the problem of getting a photograph or reproduction of the original. I even tried to get a plaster cast through a friend in Vienna, not to copy, but to recognise the *divergence*. During this dilemma, I kept forming the Venus with the light bulbs from memory. I had a xerox copy, but it was only the front view and the more I worked trying to relate to that image, the more dissatisfied my feelings about it became. I finally decided to rely on a feeling of volume in order to construct her, not to create a symbol of pre-history and fertility, but to take part in a real construction on another scale.

**SW** I wonder if going through the process with one of the other early Venuses, you would have felt as attuned with the volume, say, as in the more formally refined Perigordian figure that fascinated Brancusi?

**JP** I was quite excited by the power of her presence and suddenly realised I had to make a very strong decision, whether to include her head or not. The Willendorf head was unique in its scale. Although the hair was stylised, the size of the head seemed to have a great deal to do with a strong presence of human image recollection; her head is not an iconographical symbol as say in the Perigordian figure, which has a very small head for its volume.

**SW** Why is your replica made of light bulbs?

**JP** Since working with holography, which is of extremely high resolution, I have been very interested in low resolution imagery,

even beyond what the eye can discern. *I am gradually paring away what I consider to be an excess of information in images.* The light bulbs are light, strong and translucent. They come in a variety of sizes. With this scale change, they relate somewhat to the granularity of the limestone carving of the original, but more importantly, the resolution relates to the eye and creates a response that doesn't occur with ordinary surfaces. It's another attempt to explore matter, and the subject being the Venus of Willendorf, an object which is only 4½" high was an opportunity to explore dense matter. The pattern of how the light bulbs are stacked relates to the rods and cones in the eye.

**SW** If the replica works as a volumetric *mise en scene*, I feel the dogs take part as distant custodians.

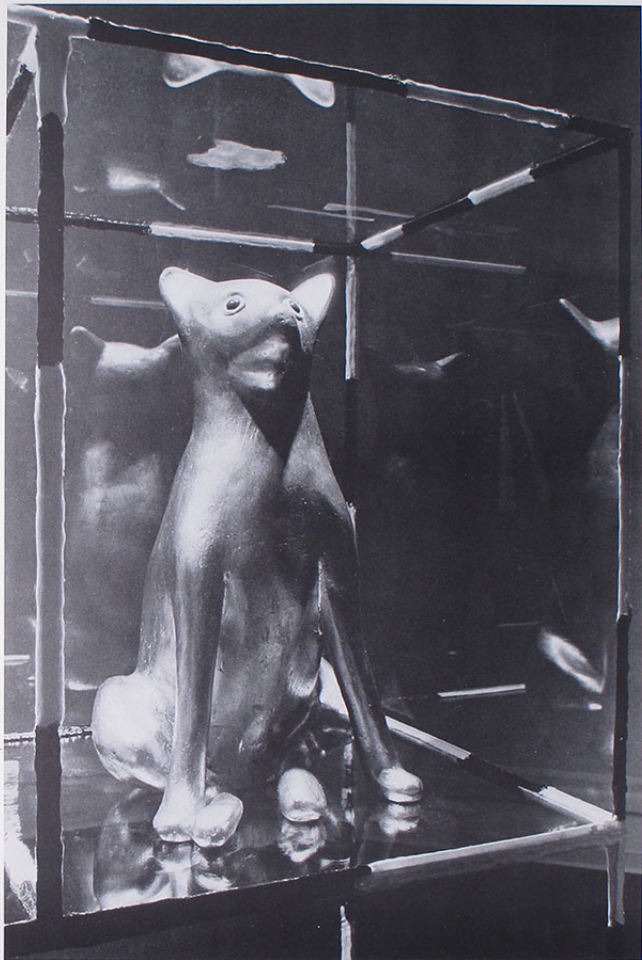
**JP** The two dogs are almost identical. They look identical at a glance, but are male and female. Their stance and stylisation enhances the similarity. They are a statue and a symbol for lions. (They become the Chinese lions that guard the gate — the demon stoppers.)

This very static and stylised aspect of a type of sculpture meant to deal with ethereal beliefs is very interesting. One of the dogs is gold and one is imitation gold, relating primarily to the optical phenomenon of sun dogs; the enamelled blue eyes and the gold are a symbol of Egyptian artifacts. Twins are a very special duality state, that although two exist, it does not necessarily mean disunity. There are Mexican twin masks that have separate features but joined into one façade. These were interesting to me for the same reason that the dogs are. They exist as a dual state of *neutrality*.

**SW** The Replica and the panel have a very strong, but quiet, projection from the early primitive simplicity through a personal exploration of self. I wondered what you felt, in context with these two, about the dogs as an indication of your future direction.

**JP** I feel that the dogs and their simplicity have continued the duality mode to a quiet acceptance of growth, not so much from ideas, but a more basic transference of vision to expression. That expression will get lost unless you keep a personal viewpoint, and it probably will get lost anyway. If you are interested in certain things, then why bother with anything else? Then a *direct response to the excitement* in your own work will not allow processing to take over.

*Jerry Pethick*



SUN DOGS/ACTUAL AND VIRTUAL (detail)



*Sun Dogs / Actual and Virtual*  
1982. glass, silicone seal, plaster, gold leaf, enamel on  
copper, paint, 145 x 112 x 64 cm



## BIOGRAPHIES

**KIM ADAMS** was born in Edmonton, Alberta, in 1951.

In 1970 he moved to Victoria where he worked full time, and from 1972 to '74 attended night school classes at the Northwest Coast Institute of the Arts. During 1975 to '76 he attended the Kootenay School of Art in Nelson where he completed first year General Arts. In 1977 Adams returned to Victoria where he studied at the University of Victoria and where he met Mowry Baden. Baden introduced him to painters, Guy Williams and Stephen Davis, who emphasized painting in its environment. At this time Adams was working on a set of paintings which consisted of black stained canvasses and powdered graphite mixed with Coca-Cola. His concerns were basically an investigation into light-sensitive surfaces, and interaction between the sets of paintings in the room and a notion of scale and reference to a gallery space. (These paintings were exhibited in "Surfaces and Systems" at the University of B.C. Fine Arts Gallery.)

In the summer of 1977 Adams attended the Banff Summer School of Art. There he began work on minimal monochrome, long rectangular box-shaped paintings that were placed low to the floor. These objects were mediated by a ramp, which, when utilized by the viewer, prevented him/her from seeing the colour. This implied a memory function of a previous activity (of viewing the painting from elsewhere in the room).

In 1977 Adams moved to Toronto and began work on a series of paintings placed on the floor of his studio. These were stretched canvasses on raised legs, a wire mesh attached above the surface and tilted. The mesh was (painstakingly) painted. The result was a braille surface on the canvas below, which effected a pointillist technique.

In 1978 Adams returned to the University of Victoria where he finished fourth year in Fine Arts. He worked on a series of monochrome colour panels, again hung low to the floor, but, the attention was focussed on a particular gallery space. The colour paintings remained as objects on the wall, some of which projected colour out into the room (the viewer's space) and others which transported colour into a recessional space.

When he began working in his studio in Victoria, his concerns were still related to the work of previous paintings but it became obvious that through this body of work the sculptural elements were of real importance and the painting activity (i.e. colour) became a secondary issue. This placed these painting-objects between the disciplines of sculpture and painting as the activity around the paintings became a primary concern or point of departure.

Adams has exhibited in group shows primarily in the Victoria and Vancouver area. During the last few years his sculpture has been exhibited in solo shows at Open Space Gallery, Victoria, 1980 and at The Ydessa Gallery, Toronto, 1981.

He lives and works in Victoria, B.C.

The artist wishes to thank Denise Attewell and Ann Venczel of The Rebounders Store, Victoria and Burnaby for the loan of the Rebounders.

**MOWRY BADEN** was born in Los Angeles, California in 1936

He received his Bachelor of Arts degree from Pomona College, Claremont, California in 1958 and his Master of Arts degree from Stanford University, California in 1965.

He has received Honnold, Fulbright and Ford Foundation Fellowships which allowed him to study in Spain, Italy and India.

In California he has taught at the Chouinard Art Institute, Stanford University, Pomona College; and in British Columbia at the University of B.C. and the University of Victoria.

Baden is currently Associate Professor, Visual Arts Department, University of Victoria.

His work has been exhibited in group and solo shows in Canada, United States, Italy and Mexico.

His solo exhibitions, since 1970, include:

California State College at Los Angeles, 1971

The Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver, B.C., 1972 and 1973

University of British Columbia, Vancouver, B.C., 1974

University of Victoria, Victoria, B.C., 1975

Otis Art Institute, Los Angeles, 1975

Pender Street Gallery, Vancouver, B.C., 1976

San Francisco Art Institute, 1976

80 Langton Street, San Francisco, 1978

He has completed commissions for the University of California at Irvine and at Santa Barbara, 1979 and 1981 respectively.



**ROLAND BRENER** studied at St. Martin's School of Art, London, England from 1963 to 1966. He lived, worked and taught in London from 1966 to 1970.

In the early 70s he taught at St. Martin's School of Art, London, and at the University of California, Santa Barbara and at the University of Iowa, Iowa.

Since 1974 he has taught and worked in Victoria. He is currently Professor, Visual Arts Department, University of Victoria, British Columbia.

His work has been widely exhibited in group and solo shows in England, Europe, South America, United States and Canada.

His solo shows, since 1970, include:

Nigel Greenwood Gallery, London, England, 1970

University of California, Santa Barbara, 1971

Santa Barbara Museum of Art, 1971

Stockwell Depot, London, England, 1972

The Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver, B.C., 1974

Pender Street Gallery, Vancouver, B.C., 1976

Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, Victoria, B.C., 1978

Stratford Art Gallery, Stratford, Ontario, 1979

80 Langton Street, San Francisco, 1979

Main Exit, Vancouver, B.C., 1981

**MARTIN BARTLETT** is a Canadian composer and performer of contemporary electronic music.

He was born in 1939, and after studies at the University of British Columbia took his M.A. at Mills College, Oakland, California, where he studied composition and electronic music with Darius Milhaud, Pauline Oliveros and David Tudor.

In 1972 he returned to Canada, and was one of the founders of the Western Front Society, an artists cooperative and performance space in Vancouver, B.C. He organized concerts of contemporary music there from 1973 to 1980.

He has written a number of works for instruments, electronics and combinations of these, including theatre pieces and interdisciplinary collaborations. Some of these compositions are *Air*, for eight instruments, a commission from the Victoria International Festival; the music for two shadow plays, *The Exploits and Opinions of Dr. Faustroll*, and *Vis-a-vis*, both performed by the Canadian Shadow Players; tape compositions, *Pulse Studies*, and *Burning Water*; and works for instruments and live electronics, such as *Response*, for trumpet and computer-controlled synthesizers; and *Assembly*, for bassoon and electronics.

He has been an active researcher in the field of electronic music for fifteen years, and has directed most of his efforts towards the development of computer controlled electronic performance systems and specially adapted computer software for use in "real-time".

In his performances, he often uses voice, text, or acoustic instruments in dynamic interaction with the electronics, as in the trumpet piece, *Response*, where the computer "listens" to the soloist's part and generates appropriate electronic "accompaniment" in accordance with its programmed instructions. He has performed in many cities in Canada and the United States, including at the first Festival of Electronic Music at the Music Gallery, Toronto.

At present, Mr. Bartlett is Associate Professor of Composition and Director of the Electronic Music Studio at the School of Music, University of Victoria, Victoria, B.C.

**ALLAN McWILLIAMS** was born in Vancouver, B.C. in 1944. He studied at the University of British Columbia and at the Vancouver School of Art (now the Emily Carr College of Art and Design).

He has taught at Douglas College, the Banff School of Fine Arts, and is currently a part-time instructor at the Emily Carr College of Art and Design.

From 1972 to 1975 he organized and curated exhibitions for the Burnaby Art Gallery, and in 1979 he was curator of "Creative Flight" for the Surrey Art Gallery and The Langley National Exhibition Centre.

Since 1968 McWilliams' work has been widely exhibited in group shows across the country. In the fall of 1981 the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria presented a solo exhibition of his work.

McWilliams lives, works and teaches in Vancouver.

**LIZ MAGOR** was born in Winnipeg, Manitoba, in 1948.

She attended the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, the Parson's School of Design, New York City and the Vancouver School of Art, graduating in 1971.

Magor has exhibited in numerous group shows across Canada since 1973. She also exhibited at the Biennale of Sydney, spring, 1982. She has had solo exhibitions at the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria in 1977 and 1979; University of British Columbia Fine Arts Gallery, 1979; Southern Alberta Art Gallery, Lethbridge, 1979; The Vancouver Art Gallery, 1980; and the Ydessa Gallery, Toronto, 1980 and 1981.

Magor is currently living and working in Toronto.

The artist would like to thank the Canada Council for its support and to extend special thanks to Pat Lovell and Dorothy Thomas.

**JERRY PETHICK** was born in London, Ontario in 1935 and he lived and attended rural and urban schools in southwestern Ontario until 1956. In 1957 he worked in a nickel mine in Levack, Ontario for one year, after which he travelled to Great Britain.

In London, England, he went to the Chelsea College of Art for three years, where he was awarded the National Diploma of Design and the Chelsea Diploma of Design. Then he worked and travelled in Europe for a year before returning to London, England, to be at the Royal College of Art, Sculpture Department in 1961. After three years there, he was made an Associate of the Royal College of Art in 1964.

For the next four years he worked and exhibited in London; with the manipulation of colours, materials, thermo-plastics; his excitement was drawn from and drawn to dimensional illusion and the poetics of space. In 1968, he saw his first hologram and made the decision to move to the United States to learn about holography and to explore its space and light. He went to Ann Arbor, Michigan, where he worked with Lloyd Cross, the physicist, in using and developing the holographic medium. He invented a sandbased stability system for making holograms that completely simplified the whole process. He and his colleagues put together the first exhibition of holograms at the Cranbrook Academy of Art in Detroit, which then travelled to New York and was toured by the New York State Museum.

At this time, he was also interested in integrals and the fly's eye lens system, and was making drawings full of illusory spaces and dimensional imagery. He had exhibitions of holograms and drawings, and some teaching at the Sculpture Department of the San Francisco Art Institute.

These encounters with San Francisco led him to move there in 1970. He started to use Fresnel lenses and prism, transparencies and reflections in his work, moving away from holography and into his own creating of optical tapestries. He made composite images from serial images; his fascination was with resolution and perception, projected illusion and light.

In San Francisco he also co-founded the School of Holography where he taught for awhile; and he spent quite a bit of time in northern California building a transparent house with friends.

He returned to Canada in 1975, when he moved to Hornby Island, British Columbia, with his family. Here, he has completed two major groups of work, using more and more light, spectral and reflected; the first was shown at The Vancouver Art Gallery in 1979. The second has been shown in stages in Nanaimo, Seattle and at The Vancouver Art Gallery.

Pethick's work has been exhibited in England, United States and Canada. His solo exhibitions, since 1973, include:

- University of British Columbia Fine Arts Gallery, Vancouver, B.C., "Light House", 1973
- Burnaby Art Gallery, Burnaby, B.C., "Light House", 1973
- Canada House, Trafalgar Square, London, England, "Look-Out", 1975
- The Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver, B.C., "The Eskimo/Krieghoff Proximity Device: A Cultural Osmosis", 1979
- Malaspina College, Nanaimo, B.C., "Stratagems of Distortion/Sensations of Illusion", Phase 1, 1981
- and/or Gallery, Seattle, Washington, "Stratagems of Distortion/Sensations of Illusion", Phase 2, 1981

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- "Bias Arrays", *Vanguard*, Vol. 5, No. 10, December 1976 - January 1977
- "Optics of Insight", *Holography Book*, 1978

The artist wishes to thank the Hornby Island Recycling Depot for the light bulbs.